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EIGHT SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

BY

THOMAS HORNE, B. D.

The religious necessity of the Reformation asserted, and the extent to which it was carried in the Church of England vindicated,

IN

EIGHT SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR MDCCCXXVIII.

AT THE

LECTURE

FOUNDED BY

THE LATE REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.,

CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY

THOMAS HORNE, B.D.

RECTOR OF ST. KATHARINE COLEMAN, AND FORMERLY
STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH.

OXFORD,

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS FOR THE AUTHOR.

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MDCCCXXVIII.



P R E F A C E.

IN committing the following Discourses to the press, according to the terms of his engagement, the Author is chiefly anxious, whatever judgment may be passed upon the result of his labours, that the motives which have influenced him in the choice of his subject may not be misinterpreted.

It may be reckoned among the greatest advantages derived from the institution of the Bampton Lectureship, that many of the most interesting questions in Christian theology have been accurately discussed, and the peculiar excellencies of Christianity itself successfully illustrated by the different preachers on whom the office has devolved. At the same time it is obvious, notwithstanding the ample range and

inexhaustible fertility of the subject-matter of their disquisitions, that the selection of an argument combining novelty with utility, and in which he has not partially at least been anticipated by some one of his predecessors, is rendered proportionally more difficult to each succeeding Lecturer.

In choosing, however, a controversial topic of strong present interest in preference to others of intrinsic and lasting importance, of which he is sensible that many still remain unexplored as well as consistent with the design of the Founder, the Author has been animated by no gratuitous love of polemical discussions, by no uncharitable spirit, or uncandid prejudice against adversaries of any description. He trusts that the manner in which he has expressed himself on every occasion will sufficiently guard him against such an imputation ; though he would not seek the praise of li-

berality at the expense of truth, nor expose his sincerity to suspicion, by apparent indifference concerning any thing of essential moment.

But the insidious hostility with which the Church of England has now for a series of years been assailed by the agents and apologists of that of Rome, and the increasing confidence with which the long dormant spiritual pretensions of the latter have been again put forth, as her worldly prospects have seemed to brighten, are the reasons which have induced him to think that he could not render a more useful service, with his limited powers, to the cause of true religion, than by recalling attention to the almost forgotten heads of dispute between them and ourselves, which it is once more become necessary for every sincere and well-informed member of our church to study and understand. He is

sensible indeed that the subject which he has thus been led to adopt is of too large dimensions for the limits within which the preacher of this Lecture is confined, and such in its nature as would require the hand of a much abler and more experienced controversialist to do it justice.

He hopes, however, that in treating it according to his own imperfect conception, and the necessarily restricted view which want of space has constrained him to take of it, he has fallen into no material error; conscious as he is that the elucidation of truth, exclusive of any private inducement or party feeling, has been his only object, either in arguing against the corruptions and misrepresentations of Romanists, which it has been his main purpose to refute, or the prejudices of Protestant Dissenters, to which he has more briefly adverted in his concluding Discourse.

In fine, as it would ever be his most cherished wish to serve the cause of that church, to which he is still less attached by professional obligations than by the most sincere conviction of her superior excellence both in the soundness of her doctrine and the spirituality of her worship, above every other branch of the universal church of Christ; so there is no consequence of his own insufficiency which he would so earnestly deprecate, as that of affording to any of her opponents an apparent advantage against her. A real one, either in her doctrine or her discipline, he is well assured that they will ever seek in vain.

CONTENTS.

LECTURE I.

1 COR. xi. 9.

For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

Page 1.

LECTURE II.

MATTHEW xi. 19.

—But wisdom is justified of her children. P. 37.

LECTURE III.

MATTHEW x. 37, 38.

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. P. 73.

LECTURE IV.

MATTHEW xv. 9.

But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. P. 109.

LECTURE V.

JOHN iv. 24.

God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. P. 147.

LECTURE VI.**1 TIMOTHY ii. 5.**

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. P. 185.

LECTURE VII.**DEUT. iv. 15.**

Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves ; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire.

P. 225.

LECTURE VIII.**JEREMIAH vi. 16.**

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. P. 267.

EXTRACT
FROM
THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT
OF THE LATE
REV. JOHN BAMPTON,
CANON OF SALISBURY.

—“ I give and bequeath my Lands and Estates to the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars of the University of Oxford for ever, to have and to hold all and singular the said Lands or Estates upon trust, and to the intents and purposes hereinafter mentioned ; that is to say, I will and appoint that the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford for the time being shall take and receive all the rents, issues, and profits thereof, and (after all taxes, reparations, and necessary deductions made) that he pay all the remainder to the endowment of eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be established for ever in the said University, and to be performed in the manner following :

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the first Tuesday in Easter Term, a Lecturer be yearly

“ chosen by the Heads of Colleges only, and by
“ no others, in the room adjoining to the Print-
“ ing-House, between the hours of ten in the
“ morning and two in the afternoon, to preach
“ eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year fol-
“ lowing, at St. Mary’s in Oxford, between the
“ commencement of the last month in Lent Term,
“ and the end of the third week in Act Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that the eight Di-
“ vinity Lecture Sermons shall be preached upon
“ either of the following subjects—to confirm and
“ establish the Christian Faith, and to confute all
“ heretics and schismatics—upon the divine au-
“ thority of the holy Scriptures—upon the author-
“ ity of the writings of the primitive Fathers, as
“ to the faith and practice of the primitive Church
“ —upon the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour
“ Jesus Christ—upon the Divinity of the Holy
“ Ghost—upon the Articles of the Christian Faith,
“ as comprehended in the Apostles’ and Nicene
“ Creeds.

“ Also I direct, that thirty copies of the eight
“ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be always print-
“ ed, within two months after they are preached,
“ and one copy shall be given to the Chancellor of
“ the University, and one copy to the Head of
“ every College, and one copy to the Mayor of the

“ city of Oxford, and one copy to be put into the
“ Bodleian Library ; and the expense of printing
“ them shall be paid out of the revenue of the
“ Land or Estates given for establishing the Di-
“ vinity Lecture Sermons : and the Preacher shall
“ not be paid, nor be entitled to the revenue, be-
“ fore they are printed.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that no person
“ shall be qualified to preach the Divinity Lecture
“ Sermons, unless he hath taken the degree of
“ Master of Arts at least, in one of the two Uni-
“ versities of Oxford or Cambridge ; and that the
“ same person shall never preach the Divinity
“ Lecture Sermons twice.”

LECTURE I.

1 COR. xi. 9.

For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

THE appearances both of the natural and moral world, more especially if viewed as insulated particulars, and not as constituent portions of a great and connected whole, are sometimes such as to stagger human reason, and to contradict our preconceived notions of wise and harmonious design.

In contemplating such apparent irregularities, the disputer of this world has recourse to fate and chance only, to account for what he does not comprehend, and is ready to question the existence of a supreme Intelligence, because he is unable to discern the principles by which it acts.

But in minds tempered and enlightened by religion faith comes to the aid of reason, and small objections, which do not admit

LECTURE I.

of an obvious solution, are not suffered to outweigh great and undeniable truths.

Whatever anomaly, therefore, may seem to exist in the actual constitution of things, it must be the firm belief of every man, who acknowledges the superintending providence of God in the world, that all things are by him wisely ordered for the best ; and no less must it be an article in the creed of every true Christian, that it is the final purpose of all his dispensations to establish more firmly, and to diffuse more widely, that religion which his only-begotten Son planted in the world. Nor is this persuasion more true in the abstract, than it is practically necessary to inspire us with hope and patience, while we look forward, through the turbulence and obscurity of human affairs, to that more perfect manifestation of the kingdom of God, which our faith teaches us to expect.

It is the exclusive attribute of the divine Wisdom to see the end from the beginning, and to make both the vicissitudes of earthly things, and even the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, when they least per-

ceive or intend it, subservient to its own designs ; and as in the material creation, a clearer sky and a purer atmosphere succeed to the convulsions of the elements, so in the moral world we may see order rising out of confusion, and the religious and intellectual state of mankind ultimately improved, through the operation of causes which, in their rise and progress, seemed only to tend to the production of evil.

In our present state of existence, in whatever the agency of man is concerned, good wholly unalloyed is not to be found. Where the malignity of a corrupt will does not betray itself, the evidences of infirmity are yet abundantly visible ; error of judgment accompanies the best intentions, and the unperceived influence of passion disturbs the most prudent counsels. But by the merciful appointment of divine Providence, evils are countervailed by evils, and remedies spring out of moral disorders ; and, in equal contradiction to the hopes of evil men and the fears of good, all things work together for the glory of God, and the welfare of mankind, in ways which human

reason could not anticipate, though the ultimate effect is obvious to the most simple observer.

The words of the apostle in the text, though in a stricter sense applicable to the case of individual Christians, and the trial of their faith from the contagion of heresy, seem to justify us in extending these principles to the state of religion in general, and in contemplating with similar views, as partial evils tending to final good, those controversies to which Christianity has been subject in almost every age, since it was first preached upon earth to that in which we live.

Heresy, in various kinds and degrees, has existed in every period of the church, has troubled its peace, has partially destroyed its union, has threatened widely to corrupt its doctrines, and undermine its faith.

From such dangers the most fatal consequences might have been apprehended and sincere piety justly alarmed; and yet, if we consider the actual state of religion, and compare it with that which undoubted history exhibits in former ages, we shall be

led to conclude that discord, and even heresy itself, have been rendered instrumental to the great design of divine Providence; that the cause of Christianity has been more effectually strengthened and promoted by the zealous efforts of piety and learning, which the obligation of vindicating its purity has called forth; that truth has been illustrated by the refutation of error, and faith more deeply rooted in the minds of true believers, by the necessity of studying its foundations, and defending it against the objections of gainsayers.

But in attributing these eventual benefits to heresy, contrary to its own nature and intention, it will not, I trust, be imagined that I mean indirectly to plead the cause of heresy itself, or to represent it, as some modern sectaries have presumed to do, as a light offence against Christian piety, to seek even the advancement of religious knowledge, or any other problematical good, by disturbing the foundations of Christian faith. My view is, merely to contemplate it in that light in which the words of the apostle seem to justify us in placing it, as

conducive to the vital efficacy of pure religion, by exciting a cautious vigilance against the propagation of error, and keeping alive that zealous spirit of inquiry after truth, which is so peculiarly characteristic of Christianity, and which experience seems to justify us in regarding as its conservative principle, and under the influence of divine grace the most effectual antidote to the natural apathy of the human mind concerning spiritual things. Contending sects have indeed been too ready to charge each other with the guilt of heresy ; and in the heat of religious controversy, slight disagreements, concerning abstruse and purely abstract points of opinion, have been too hastily assumed as a sufficient foundation for the charge.

From such mutual criminations the spirit of Christian charity should restrain us, whenever the interest of necessary truth is not concerned ; and we should be slow to cast upon others an imputation, which, if we are true Christians, we ought above all worldly reproaches to be unwilling to deserve ; and whatever the ultimate conse-

quence of heretical principles may be, wantonly to disseminate them, or in any way to sow the seeds of animosity and causeless division in the church, whether out of vanity or a spirit of contradiction, we have the highest authority for pronouncing to be a sin of grievous impiety. I would merely assume it as the basis of my argument, that the machinations of designing infidelity, as well as the crude conceits of self-sufficient folly, have been permitted to exercise the faith and provoke the zeal of Christians, for the prevention of greater evils. And as it must be our belief that nothing comes to pass, in the natural or moral creation, without the appointment or permission of its omniscient Author, it seems to follow by necessary consequence, that a state of things, which in a greater or less degree has attended upon Christianity in all the successive stages of its duration hitherto, would not have been suffered to exist, if it had not been upon the whole the most conducive to its advancement, and perfectly consistent with those good purposes, both ultimate and immediate,

which that dispensation was designed to effect.

Nor is there any thing in this view of the subject, which is not warranted by experience and analogy, if we may be allowed in questions of religion to reason at all from temporal to spiritual things. It is well known that the progress of every art and science, and especially those which are most refined and intellectual, has been greatly assisted by the discussion of opposite theories, and the controversies maintained concerning their true principles; and in like manner it is undeniably certain, that our religion has derived the strongest additional confirmation, not only from the sober disputation of learned and pious men concerning its general evidences and peculiar doctrines, but even from the licentious violence of its adversaries, who have left nothing unsaid, which their depraved ingenuity could suggest, to weaken its authority. The most artfully constructed system of falsehood could never have resisted such attacks as have been successively directed against every side of Christianity which, in

the opinion of its adversaries, has appeared the weakest ; and if Christianity has not only stood unshaken against them, but its foundations have been strengthened, and its true principles more perfectly illustrated, through the vain attempts of infidels to subvert the one, and of heretics to obscure the other, we have in this very fact a ground of confidence, which cannot be too highly appreciated, and which it is evident that we never could have possessed, if the abortive attempts of its various enemies to effect its ruin had not by their signal failure provided it for us. It is indeed to the fiery trials which it has so repeatedly gone through, and which must have consumed it if it had been of a baser texture, that we are indebted for the strongest proof that it is imperishable, and that it emanated wholly from the wisdom of God, and not the invention of man.

But, indeed, the whole history of our religion proves nothing more clearly, than the truth which holy writ declares, that ^a*God seeth not as man seeth*, and that ^b*his ways are past (our) finding out*.

^a 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

^b Rom. xi. 33.

It is scarcely too much to assert, that almost every circumstance, attending the promulgation of the gospel, was directly the reverse of what human wisdom would have chosen for the furtherance of the same ends. And certainly it is not more foreign to our apprehension, that the arrogant and irreverent disputers of this world should be rendered subservient to the elucidation and final confirmation of Christianity, than is that other unquestionable fact, “that the persecutions which the first Christians endured for the sake of their faith, and by which its enemies confidently expected to crush it, powerfully contributed to its rapid diffusion and final establishment.”

It may seem an objection to this argument, that harmony of doctrine and affections is so strongly enjoined both by our Lord himself and his apostles, and that the faithful are warned to avoid those who should seek to sow divisions among them, as well as exhorted *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*; and he indeed would have learned Christ to little purpose, who

did not think it among the first of his duties, to promote, not only the spirit of brotherly love among all his members, but that also which is its surest and best foundation, an entire agreement in all the articles of the Christian faith. Such a state of religion is unquestionably the most favourable for the practice of every Christian virtue, when discordant passions have ceased to darken the understandings and pervert the affections of true believers ; and whatever branch of the universal church can most truly boast of such an union, so founded, among its members, may justly be considered to have approached nearest to Christian perfection. But that the kingdom of God is not yet so come among men, that his church in any nation or country may joyfully serve him in all godly quietness, without fear and without partiality, is lamentably certain ; and while we humbly hope that all things are tending towards that blessed consummation, in so far at least as may consist with the militant state of the church upon earth, we cannot but see that obstacles to it exist, which it is be-

yond the power of human wisdom to remove by the most zealous efforts of reason or persuasion ; but for which a gradual remedy appears to be provided even in that licence of discussion which springs out of religious corruption, and which, though neither prompted nor guided by a spirit of sincere piety, may yet, in spite of itself, serve the cause of truth, by dissipating the fictions of error, which sophistry, ignorance, or fanaticism have raised to obscure it.

In attributing, therefore, to the heresies which at different periods have agitated the church, and which may not improperly be regarded as symptoms of a diseased state of faith and morals, consequences ultimately beneficial to religion, we merely assert, that in this, as in other cases, the wisdom of God has brought good out of evil ; not that heresy is either good in itself, or void of fearful guilt to its authors; although, like some who, as ^a St. Paul says, *preached Christ out of strife and contention, and not sincerely*, they may contri-

^a Phil. i. 16, &c.

bute unintentionally to the advancement of true religion.

It was but for a very short season that the primitive church enjoyed perfect internal tranquillity, with untainted purity of faith. Even in the lifetime of the apostles the arrogance, folly, and corruption of man had ^b*brought in damnable heresies*. Various errors were introduced into the infant church which they had planted, by false brethren, and no inconsiderable part of their Epistles is occupied in the refutation of such errors, and in warning those to whom they wrote against the danger of being seduced by them. The history of the following ages exhibits a lamentable picture of the workings of the same perverse spirit; and in proportion as the pale of the church was extended among different nations and languages, the sources of corruption were multiplied and enlarged.

Even before the great influx of the Gentiles into the church, which followed upon the conversion of Constantine, and the adop-

^b 2 Pet. ii. 1, &c.

tion of Christianity for the religion of the Roman empire, many depravations of the Christian verity had crept into it, while Christians were yet exposed to the rage of persecution from without, and no worldly inducement existed within, to tempt the followers of a crucified Redeemer to vitiate their faith. But after that event heresies rapidly multiplied, of the greater part of which the names only now remain, to attest that they once existed ; and while we are grieved in contemplating the actual corruptions of Christianity in some countries, and the variety of doctrines which have arisen through the abuse of Christian liberty in others, it is yet a source of great consolation to observe how far they fall short of the absurdity and impiety of those pristine adulterations of evangelical truth, whose characteristic peculiarities have been preserved in ecclesiastical records. Various were the sources of those ancient heresies ; some originated with Jewish converts, who, in their zeal for the Mosaic dispensation, sought to amalgamate the old law with the new ; but a much greater proportion with

Gentiles, who had imperfectly unlearned their former superstitions, and still partially retained them after their conversion to Christianity; and not a few were borrowed from different systems of heathen philosophy, which their authors, wedded to their former studies, attempted to blend with Christianity. Some again were the offspring of enthusiasm, which is ever the disease of weak minds, and some owed their birth to the more culpable love of singularity, and the vain desire of distinction, through which too many individuals, of unsound principles and shallow understandings, have in all ages been tempted to seek a worthless celebrity by the propagation of error, rather than the silent approbation of a good conscience by maintaining the truth. To these causes severally the various corruptions of Christian faith and doctrine in the early ages may be referred; and the best practical view which, at this distance of time, we can take of them all collectively, is to look upon them as certain symptoms of that moral corruption of human nature, which our holy religion was

intended to heal, and to learn from them, to beware for ourselves of departing on either side from that rule of faith and practice which the divine Wisdom has prescribed to us. But a total cessation of such evidences of sinfulness and infirmity, though we are bound to pray for the continual increase of grace and truth, in the present condition of mankind we cannot hope to see; and hardly would such a degree of Christian perfection be compatible with that state of probation in which we are here placed for our final good.

In fact, no age of the church has been, nor, as far as we can conjecture by a review of the past, and a consideration of the causes which have produced such effects, is ever likely to be, exempt from the infestations of heresy. But it would be inconsistent with the belief that God is ever wise and good, and that his mercy is over all his works, to suppose that He would suffer the existence of error and division, without any countervailing good to be derived from them, and leave those whom the scriptures represent as the peculiar objects

of his regard, the poor, the simple, and unlearned, who must ever make up the bulk of mankind, exposed to the imminent danger of seduction through false apostles and false teachers, such as have disseminated their fanatical delusions and pestilent perversions of the truth in every age, if the toleration of these partial evils was absolutely inconsistent with the purity and effectual influence of that religion which he has vouchsafed to reveal, and which all men are required to embrace, as the sole condition of obtaining eternal salvation. Nor does it appear to be a sufficient answer to such an objection, that it is only by the abuse of their own free will that men can be exposed to the danger of heresy, and that the justice and goodness of God are sufficiently vindicated, if he has afforded to all men the means of knowing the truth, but they choose error in preference to it. For, in fact, even in the most improved state of human society which has ever yet existed, or is ever likely to exist, there are few comparatively who are capable of judging for themselves in controverted points of doctrine, but the greater

LECTURE I.

part must of necessity follow the direction of those whom they believe qualified by superior acquirements to guide them right; and there have been times when errors have widely infected the church, and seduced multitudes in almost every Christian nation. If therefore such errors, not proceeding from a wilful preference of darkness to light, nor accompanied with impurity of heart and moral corruption, could totally deprive those who ignorantly fell into them, or unconsciously imbibed them together with the first rudiments of knowledge, of the benefits of the gospel covenant, the goodness of God, and the honour of his moral government, would seem to require, that the possibility of so dreadful a consequence should be precluded, even by depriving men, if the same end could not otherwise be attained, of that free agency which they were in so great danger of abusing to their own destruction, so as to convert the covenant of grace into an occasion of heavier condemnation. Still less is it consistent with the mercy of God and his love for man, which the scriptures teach

us to consider as the essential, originating principle of Christianity, to suffer his gracious designs towards our fallen race to be rendered of none effect through causes springing out of the inherent infirmity of our nature, independent of our own individual wills, or to be defeated by the spirit of delusion. That God is ever gracious and merciful, and that he willeth not that any should perish everlastinglly, but that all should be converted, and saved through the knowledge of the truth, is a point of faith which every Christian ought to hold as firmly as any article of his creed, and not to suffer any speculative view of mysterious and unsearchable truths to shake his confidence in this first principle of true piety.

Seeing, therefore, that heresy, or the principle of discord, or by whatever other appellation we may call it, (for we should not with indiscriminating severity affix the same stigma to the greatest and the smallest departure from orthodox opinion,) has been permitted to exist, and that, notwithstanding its intrinsically pernicious character, it has neither prevailed against the truth, nor

LECTURE I.

weakened its force, nor tainted its purity, but, on the contrary, that our holy religion has continued to shine forth with increasing brightness, in spite of those passing clouds which human perverseness from time to time has raised to obscure it, we are led to consider it as one of those means of apparent destruction, which the divine wisdom has converted to the furtherance of its own gracious purposes towards mankind by the fuller confirmation of the truth. It is readily admitted, that if all who ever have professed themselves Christians, had been animated by a sincere faith and a dutiful respect for our Lord's commands for the cultivation of unity and brotherly love, neither heresy nor discord could have found an entrance into the church. But this is a state of religion which in reality has never existed, and cannot therefore be assumed in ideal possibility as a ground of argument against that which is evident and palpable. It is indeed a degree of perfection, at which we are each in our several capacities bound to aim, but such as we cannot hope fully to attain, and much less that the aggre-

gate Christian community shall ever be so changed from its present imperfect condition, as to be uniformly influenced by a sense of religious duty; since our Lord himself has assured us, that *“it must needs be that offences come,* and that *“the wheat and the tares must be left to grow together till the great harvest.”*

Christianity, from the beginning, was designed for beings subject to much evil and many infirmities, which the whole power of religion is not more than sufficient to heal, where its doctrines are set forth with the greatest fidelity, and its precepts most sincerely obeyed. But if the fountain of living waters be itself defiled, if religion be contaminated by those vices and follies of mankind which it was intended to correct, or vitiated by the improbity of those whose especial office it is to guard its purity, till, like *“the salt which had lost its savour,”* it become unfit for the purpose for which the divine Goodness designed it, and its corruptions be reduced to a system, it is

^c Matt. xviii. 7. ^d Matt. xiii. 29—36. ^e Luke xiv. 34.

evident, that unless its original soundness and vitality can be restored, human depravity must be left to pursue its headlong course without check or remedy.

When, therefore, moral degeneracy and infidel indifference had succeeded to the zeal and purity of the earlier ages, and gross darkness had well nigh overwhelmed the light of the gospel; when, in consequence of the decay of true piety, the holy and reasonable service of Christianity had been supplanted by heathenish pomps and idle ceremonies, and spiritual holiness exchanged for bodily austerities; when the study of the holy scriptures was generally neglected, and fabulous legends, rivalling in absurdity, and scarcely inferior in impiety to the mythology of the heathen, had banished from the minds of the deluded multitude all just notions of God and religion, it is evident that a crisis had arrived which required the exertion of an extraordinary force to burst the spell of delusion, and to renovate the faith, that it might not become utterly extinct, and *the gates of hell finally prevail against the church.* That such

was the state of religion during a long period, in which the Roman pontiffs exercised an absolute and undisputed power through every country in these parts of Europe, is attested by proofs which must bring conviction to every unprejudiced mind, and is very faintly denied even by those to whose pretensions the admission of such a fact is fatal, however they may attempt to qualify or disguise it.

At the same time we willingly admit that there have been holy, if not enlightened men, even in the darkest ages of the church. But that does not militate against our argument. God did not leave himself wholly without witness in the heathen world, when it was generally overspread with superstition and crime ; and still less is it to be supposed, that in the worst times of Christianity there have not been some men worthy of the Christian name. But their number was as nothing to the surrounding mass of ignorance and corruption ; and their endeavours to rekindle knowledge, and awaken true piety, however honourable to themselves and their religion, of which they

shone as lights in a dark place, were insufficient to effect any lasting amendment of faith or morals, even in the circumscribed scenes of their labours. A more efficient principle than individual zeal or example was required to accomplish so great a work; and until men were awakened by some strong excitement from the spiritual lethargy in which they were sunk, there was no power of sufficient energy to dissipate ignorance, and break the bands of superstition. Blind acquiescence in abused authority was the perpetual safeguard of corruption ; and no remedy, short of the immediate interposition of divine power, except religious controversy of the most animated kind, was adequate to the inveterate and complicated evils under which religion laboured. In that morbid state of religion, even the effervescence of human passions contributed to the removal of corruption, and strife and contention, under the supreme control of divine Providence, were rendered auxiliary to the correction of that vitiated state of faith and morals out of which they sprung, and in some respects

availed to supply the place of a purer zeal.

Thus it was that, after a long night of palpable darkness, as the light of knowledge began again to dawn upon the world, a spirit of religious inquiry arose with it, which, from small and almost imperceptible beginnings, led, step by step, to that great event, the most important which has ever engaged the attention of mankind since the first preaching of the gospel—the reformation of religion in the western church; which, after many indications of its approach in different parts of Europe, at length, upon the revival of learning, and the renewed study of the holy scriptures, broke out with full force in the early part of the sixteenth century, and still continues to occupy the attention, and in various ways to interest the feelings of the Christian world. The agitation of minds which commenced with that great crisis has not even yet subsided, and although the external symptoms are less violent, we see and feel that the moving principle has not lost its force; and we may be permitted to

hope, that it will not cease to act, till, with the grace of God, it has had its perfect work; till it has banished out of the universal church those corruptions of faith, doctrine, and worship, which have given occasion to infidelity, and perpetuated discord; and until all true Christians are re-established in *the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace*, not by blind and unreasoning submission to any human authority, but by the increase of knowledge and the demonstration of the truth.

The blessings of which the reformation has been the source to those nations of the Christian world which have embraced it, and indirectly even to those which have opposed it, can hardly be appreciated adequately to their vast importance. Without some knowledge of ecclesiastical history, in particular, no estimate can be formed of the extent and variety of good which it has accomplished. The light which sprung out of religion, as soon as it was freed from the incumbrances and pollutions of superstition, widely diffused itself through the whole circumference of human affairs. It

was the commencement of a new era in the history of the human mind, and without incurring the charge of exaggeration from any competent judge, it may be confidently asserted, that its beneficial influence has been felt in every branch of learning, in every department of science, and in every institution of civil society.

But how great soever the external and contingent benefits may be, which have attended the reformation, it is by its religious merits only, without worldly respects of any kind, unless in so far as they may be admitted as evidences of its real character, that the cause of the reformation must be tried and decided.

It did not originate in human policy, but, like Christianity itself, in the beginning made its way in opposition to temporal as well as spiritual power. Its subsequent influence in improving the temporal state of society could not have been contemplated by those who first raised their voices against the corruptions of Rome; and among the many unworthy motives attributed to them by their adversaries, that

of political calculation has hardly yet found a place. With its political consequences, therefore, we have properly no concern; and in the prosecution of these Lectures, in which it will be my humble endeavour to vindicate its general principle, as well as the particular modification of it adopted and retained in this country, I propose carefully to abstain from all secular and ephemeral considerations, and to view it only according to its permanent and strictly religious bearings. Neither are we bound to justify every circumstance attending its rise and progress, nor to prove that those who laboured in its cause or patronised its increase, were free from the infirmities common to man, though much may be said in extenuation of the errors into which they were sometimes hurried through the intemperance of precipitate zeal, or goaded by virulent provocation.

When first the human mind was relieved from the pressure of religious bondage, and men began to reason freely upon subjects concerning which it had before been hardly permitted to think, it is not to be wondered

if they sometimes exceeded the bounds of moderation, and displayed their attachment to a cause which so strongly interested their feelings, with unbecoming vehemence; nor is it any disparagement to the cause itself, if its ablest and most distinguished advocates were not agreed upon all points among themselves.

According to the view which has been taken, collision of opinion was necessary, when first the spell of superstition was broken, as in almost all cases it is highly conducive to the elucidation of truth.

The sluggish mass of unreasoning apathy was to be awakened into life and motion, before it could be enlightened, and purged of its errors; and we may be permitted, without irreverent presumption, to conclude, that what we still behold, that very *concordia discors*, that agreement among all Protestants concerning the main points of the Reformation, while at the same time they disputed warmly concerning matters of inferior moment, though yet not of trifling importance, was agreeable to the designs of divine Providence, to keep alive

the vital principle of renovated religion, and to prevent the spark which had been struck out from being extinguished by supervening indifference, till it had blazed forth into a burning and a shining light.

It has been the necessary consequence of this want of concert among the leaders of the reformation in different countries, that the local churches severally established under their auspices have been differently constituted, and that perfect harmony, which is so much to be wished among those who hold in common the same fundamental truths, and appeal to the same authority, the written word of God alone, in support of all the articles of faith which they respectively profess, and in vindication of every doctrine which they maintain, is yet unaccomplished ; and while every church which has thrown off the dominion of Rome is stigmatized with heresy and apostasy by the adherents of the papal power, each is occasionally called upon to defend itself against some imputation of error, on the part of those with whom it would wish to draw more close the bonds of mutual affection.

Such is, more especially, the position of the established church of this kingdom, which, in asserting its own independence, neither retained demonstrable error, because it pleaded the prescription of antiquity against reason and scripture, nor embraced novelties, because of the temporary charm which belongs to them, nor rejected what was useful and good, from a gratuitous love of change. And as it is of the last importance to us all to know the ground whereon we stand, to be assured, on the one hand, that we are not in sinful schism, because we have renounced the communion of the church of Rome, and on the other, that we are in no degree partakers of her corruptions, because we have retained the primitive order of ecclesiastical ministry instituted by the apostles, and which that church has also retained, though not in its original purity; it will be my aim, in the ensuing Discourses, to vindicate our church from these opposite charges; to shew, in answer to one class of accusers, that we did not separate from that of Rome, till her corruptions of faith, doctrine, and worship,

had rendered it impossible to continue in her communion, without hazarding, or rather abandoning the essentials of religion; and to the other, that we retained nothing of her usages, but such as she had received in times antecedent to her corruption, and which were common to all churches founded by the apostles, and not peculiar to that of Rome. On many different points of the general argument, as it respects these various heads, volumes have been written, which claim the profound attention of the student in theology, and to the demonstrative force of which it is scarcely possible that any thing can be added by the future advocates of our church, unless it be novelty in the manner of conducting her defence, against similar novelty in the attacks of her adversaries. But the substantial merits of her cause have long been settled, in the opinion of candid and impartial judges, by irrefragable argument and testimony. To many, however, of her sound members, even in the educated classes of society, there is a want of leisure or inclination to enter deeply into the subject; and by too many

this most momentous inquiry, in an age, too, of much literary and scientific pretension, though none can be imagined more worthy of a truly philosophic mind, is overlooked with supercilious blindness, as if it was fit only to occupy the attention of those who are professionally bound to study it; and that too, although more important consequences evidently depend upon it, even to the temporal welfare of mankind, than upon all the discoveries of science or the combinations of politics. Cautiously abstaining, therefore, from abstruse subtleties, which are more fit to engage the retired student than the general inquirer, I trust it will not be deemed unseasonable, or foreign to the purpose of these Lectures, if I attempt to give a candid exposition of some of the most prominent of the causes which originally determined our separation from the church of Rome, and to shew, independently of all extraneous and temporary considerations, that they were not only of sufficient moment to justify that definitive measure, but to render the adoption of it an imperative duty.

LECTURE I.

In conclusion, I shall briefly advert to the principal differences which disunite us from our protestant brethren, my ultimate object being to shew, that as in respect to the church from which we have ourselves withdrawn, the reformation was on religious grounds founded in absolute necessity ; so in respect to those who dissent from us on minor questions, though embarked in the same great cause with us, that it was conducted on sound principles by our reformers, and terminated at the point which, when the heat of controversy shall have yielded to sober reflection, and the unreasonableness of inveterate prejudice to the irresistible force of truth, wisdom and piety must approve.

This is the extent of my design ; and how imperfect soever the execution of it may be, I humbly pray that my insufficiency may never redound to the injury of the cause, which it is my anxious desire as well as my duty to serve ; and which, I am assuredly persuaded, can never be overthrown by the efforts of its enemies, if not weakened and endangered by the indiscretion of

its friends, who in the warmth of inconsiderate zeal, without adequate experience and due preparation, may come forward to defend it.

That the truth of God will finally prevail over all opposition, it would savour of infidelity to doubt. But in the opinion of the world plausible error, advantageously displayed, often obtains a transient superiority over it.

The best founded confidence in the intrinsic goodness of our cause should therefore neither inspire us with presumption, nor render us inattentive to the legitimate means of promoting its success.

LECTURE II.

MATTHEW xi. 19.

—*But wisdom is justified of her children.*

THE advocates of the church of Rome, in their contests with protestants, exhibit a policy which strongly indicates the conscious weakness of their cause. Instead of ^a*bringing forth their strong reasons*, and appealing to any mutually acknowledged authority in support of them, they endeavour for the most part to preoccupy attention with points of inferior moment, or of no moment at all, and studiously keep out of sight those weightier matters, on the right understanding of which the whole merits of the question between them and their opponents mainly depend; and not unfrequently they become the assailants, because they are unable to defend them-

^a Isaiah xli. 21.

selves. Upon these principles they have acted from the reformation down to the present day; and the modern champions of the cause still continue to tread in the footsteps of those who have gone before them, adopting only such modifications as the different circumstances under which they write appear to suggest.

To use unnecessary harshness in characterizing the conduct of an adversary in any case is ungenerous, and more likely to injure than to benefit the party which has recourse to it. But in controversies of religion, from which passion and prejudice should as far as possible be excluded, it is peculiarly unbecoming; and they who argue in behalf of Christian truth should be careful to do it in a Christian spirit; and not indulge in asperity of expression, beyond what the necessity of the case demands. Neither would it be wise, in forming an estimate of the feelings of Roman Catholics towards the church of which we are members, or the protestant name in general, to lay too great a stress on the reasonings or statements of obscure and

narrow-minded writers^b, who may be disavowed by their superiors, if their absurdity and intemperance should threaten injury to their own cause.

But if we look to those whose characters stand highest for talents and literary acquirements, and whose authority is held in the highest estimation among the members of their own community, we shall still find such a lamentable want of equity and candour, as can be accounted for only by the intolerant principles of their church ; and it is as true of the main pillars of the papal cause as of its meanest supporters, that the expedients on which their chief reliance is placed are such as we cannot truly characterize, without departing from that moderation and forbearance which on all accounts it is most desirable to observe^c, and which are more especially suited to such a

^b Such as Eusebius Andrews, and others of the same stamp.

^c I allude here more particularly to Gandolphy's Sermons, Lingard's History, Milner's End of Religious Controversy, and Butler's Book of the Roman Catholic Church, all modern productions of English Roman Catholics.

cause as we maintain, and which requires indeed nothing more than impartial consideration to ensure its preponderance in every mind accessible to truth.

It may be pleaded on the part of our adversaries, that they are not guilty of intentional injustice; that whatever they advance against us they believe to be founded in reason and fact; and the strong delusion to which they have given themselves up may render it credible that they are so persuaded. But in acquitting them of wilful unfaithfulness, their competency either as advocates or witnesses of the truth will be little benefited by attributing their multi-form misrepresentations to the influence of delirious bigotry, which distorts and discolors every object presented to the mind's eye. Nor is there, after all the allowance which can reasonably be made for the effects of such a mental distemper, any sufficient apology for receiving and asserting as true, whatever, by such candid and diligent inquiry as the importance of the subject demands of every sincere man, might certainly be discovered not to be so.

It is unnecessary to the attainment of essential truth, which is the only valuable end of inquiry, to notice the many irrelevant arguments and unjust representations which have been employed to discredit the reformation, nor could it be accomplished in the most cursory manner within a much greater space than these Lectures afford. Without adverting, therefore, to those minor topics, which have been introduced only to embarrass and confound and distract attention, I shall apply myself solely to the consideration of such heads of controversy as are of essential importance to the right understanding of the real question between our church and that of Rome ; viz. “ Which “ of the two, in its actual state, is the more “ justly entitled to be considered as a true “ church of Christ ? ” abstaining as much as possible from every thing which can irritate or offend, without contributing to elucidate the truth, at the same time suppressing nothing which the vindication of our principles necessarily requires to be candidly asserted.

In two particulars, however, a slight de-

parture from this course appears to be requisite; and the examination of these shall form the substance of the present Lecture, that we may afterwards proceed without prejudice to the discussion of those fundamental positions on which, religiously considered, the cause of the reformation must stand or fall; and on none but such as are properly and exclusively religious would any honest inquirer or sincere Christian wish to see it maintained. That this course of proceeding is not agreeable to Roman Catholics we have already observed. They have used all sorts of weapons to dazzle the ignorant and superficial, and to secure to themselves an apparent victory: but on none do they appear to place so much reliance as on the imputations which they incessantly cast on the personal characters and motives of the reformers, and the effects which, with the blindest injustice, they persist in attributing to the reformation itself.

What the real importance of these cirminations may be, and what weight they ought to have in determining the judgment

of pious and prudent men, is therefore a subject in a general point of view entitled to our serious consideration.

It is natural to wish that the undertakers and perfecters of every great and good work, more especially of such as has for its professed object the glory of God and the spiritual good of men, should not only be free from great blemishes, but, if possible, superior even to the infirmities incident to the nature of ordinary men ; and if the principle be not carried to excess, it cannot be denied that it is reasonable and just to form our judgment of the motives and intentions of those, who profess more than a common zeal in such a cause, by their known character and conduct in the ordinary relations of life. It is not only agreeable to the common feelings of mankind to judge by this rule, but in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Romans we find St. Paul pointedly arguing against the hypocrisy of those who condemned sin in others while they continued in the practice of it themselves. We see also the same principle exemplified in its abuse by the insidious policy of the Pha-

risees, who, when they found themselves unable to impeach the doctrine of our Lord, calumniated him to the people as *a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners*, hoping by such slanderous charges to destroy his influence with the people, if they could but persuade them that his life was inconsistent with the character which he assumed of *a teacher sent from God*. In like manner the apostles also were traduced as disturbers of the public peace, and *subverters of the world*; while at the same time they afforded not the slightest pretext for such a charge, but proved equally by their conduct and their doctrines, that respect for lawful authority, of every kind and degree, was enforced and cherished by them as a part of religious duty. It is therefore the less to be wondered, that the treatment which the reformers have experienced from Roman Catholic historians and controversialists should be precisely similar in kind. But indeed the animosity with which the most vene-

^d Luke vii. 34.

erable names among them are still attacked, and the rancour with which every antiquated charge is repeated against them, however suspicious or improbable the original grounds of it may be, afford a melancholy proof how soon the principles of true religion are forgotten, when men give themselves up to the blind intemperance of a bigoted spirit, while at the same time they furnish a strong presumption against the general credibility of those accusations, which were alleged against them by contemporary writers; who, in addition to the heat of so great a controversy, were animated by feelings of personal resentment, or allured by prospects of ambition, to signalize their zeal against the authors of a change which portended such a diminution of their own influence and power. Against such calumnious attacks the characters of the reformers in general, both in this and other countries, have been abundantly vindicated, where at least freedom of discussion is not precluded by the power and policy of their adversaries.

And though we claim not for the re-

formers of our own church an exemption from human failings, we have just cause to bless God for the grace bestowed on them, when we contemplate the examples which they have left us of piety and zeal, as well as of patient fortitude, in supporting the dreadful sufferings through which, like the first Christians, they were doomed to pass in the execution of their holy enterprise. And if some of those, whose memory is most dear and venerated among us, exhibited, under the near prospect of fiery trials, something of human weakness, instead of insulting their memories with envenomed malignity, as too many of those have continued to do, who have succeeded to the inheritance of those tenets and principles against which they contended unto blood, it would better become them to lament the cruel excesses of their predecessors, and to disclaim any community of feeling with men, who, whether instigated by polemic rage, or a still more detestable spirit of worldly policy, outwent the barbarity of pagan persecutions under the cloke of religious zeal. But the bitter calumnies in-

vented and continually repeated against the leaders of the reformation, are not only unworthy of any cause which good men may espouse, but have recoiled upon those who have condescended to employ them, as false representations generally do, and by their extravagance have refuted themselves. For if we admit, for the sake of argument, that the reformers were such as their enemies have painted them^e, it must necessarily follow, that they could have had no adherents, unless among the most worthless members of society, a fact which even their accusers have not yet ventured to affirm, and in the next generation both themselves and their reformation could have been remembered *only* to be abhorred.

A short-lived enthusiasm has often been excited in favour of a bad cause, and the leaders and abettors of imposture have enjoyed the misplaced applause of their own generation. But truth and reason must in time resume their empire, and impartial

^e Vide *passim* Bossuet's *Variations of Protestants*, Milner's *End of Controversy*, and Butler's *Book of the Roman Catholic Church*.

posterity seldom fails to atone for the injustice and folly of preceding times, and to stamp, according to their respective merits, the opposing champions of every denomination ; and yet it is certain, that, after the most rigid scrutiny into their conduct and principles, the chiefs of the reformation have lost nothing of that veneration which the suffrages of former generations had awarded them ; and the railing accusations of their adversaries have been more injurious to the reputation of their authors, and the cause in support of which such immoral means have been employed, than of those against whom they have been directed.

But, after all that can be said on either side, of what value is this personal argument in deciding the merits of the reformation ? While the Roman pontiffs arrogate to themselves such powers and prerogatives as are shocking to Christian piety, and claim little less than the attributes of Divinity, it might indeed be reasonably expected, that they should at all times be free at least from gross vices, and eminent in religious and moral virtue. And yet, though the

contrary is most notorious with respect to many of them, and among the rest concerning him who filled the papal chair when first Luther rose up in opposition to his spiritual domination, no rational protestant would ever think that alone a sufficient justification of the conduct of so many Christian communities in rejecting his authority, and renouncing the fellowship of the Romish church ; and still less could it be pleaded in vindication of the continuance of that separation, if causes of infinitely greater moment than the personal merits or demerits of any individual, or number of individuals, at any given time, had not determined them to adopt it, and to persist in maintaining it. The duty of preserving the unity of the body of Christ is too strongly enforced in scripture to admit the breach of it, unless the preservation of truth and holiness demand it ; and unless we can prove to our Roman Catholic brethren, that our reformation was conducted and perfected upon that principle, we must submit to bear the reproach of heresy and schism, which they so unspar-

ingly cast upon us, and acknowledge ourselves guilty of criminal contumacy in refusing allegiance to their spiritual head.

But if, while we venerate the memory of those who conducted our reformation, we ground not that great work upon their personal merits, nor place any reliance on the notorious corruptions of the Romish hierarchy, at that period, in vindication of it, unless in so far as those corruptions were the natural or necessary consequence of their system of religion, we must not suffer them, on their side, to convert that which is altogether a question of principles into a personal dispute, nor to attack the reformation itself through the real or imputed faults and imperfections of any of its advocates. Still less must we allow the conduct of princes or statesmen, who may have been influenced by worldly respects, by resentment, cupidity, or ambition, in adopting or defending it, to have any weight in determining our judgment concerning it.

The despotic violence of that prince, whose quarrel with the see of Rome first made an opening for the reformation in

this country, has but an accidental connection with the reformation itself. It cannot be supposed that a man of his character was much influenced by religious feelings in the inconsistent conduct which he pursued, alternately formidable to its friends and its enemies ; and it is probable that he espoused it principally because it favoured his purpose of emancipating his own sovereignty from the spiritual supremacy of the pope, and possessing himself of the enormous wealth which superstitious delusion or mistaken piety had heaped upon the monastic orders. Whatever his measures were, he acted under the influence of his own policy or passion ; and when Roman Catholics attempt to bring forward his conduct as an argument against the reformation of our national church, it is little less than an acknowledgment, that on religious grounds they find it unassailable ; while, at the same time, if there was any value in recrimination, we might retort with tenfold severity the massacres and persecutions committed by Roman Catholic sovereigns in almost every country of Europe, at the

instigation of Romish ecclesiastics, and even of the popes themselves, and seconded by their warmest applause. Not a few such unhappy princes, misled by their spiritual guides, have earned for themselves an immortality of infamy, scarcely exceeded by that of the most cruel heathen persecutors of the church^f; but which ought to attach, in an aggravated degree, to the memory of those faithless ministers of religion, of whose spiritual wickedness they were the deluded, but not guiltless instruments. But whatever advantage, in respect to the personal merits of the friends and enemies of the reformation, might result from such a comparison, to the protestant cause—and a greater could not well be desired—we reject it altogether, as irrelevant to the subject of debate between us.

The truth of God will stand, though all men should be found liars; and what is essentially good cannot be depraved by the perverseness of those who abuse it. In

^f Such as our unhappy Mary, Francis the First, Philip the Second, Charles the Ninth, Lewis the Fourteenth, &c. Charles Emanuel of Savoy, &c.

every other case this principle is admitted. We do not therefore reject, as false or useless, the moral philosophy of the Socratic school, because many who made profession of it were untrue to their own principles, and led immoral lives ; nor would it be less unreasonable to condemn indiscriminately the entire system of religion professed in the church of Rome, because its highest places have sometimes been filled by bad men, or even reputed infidels ; and many of its external defenders have had little other proof of faith to shew, except that very equivocal one of persecuting zeal, against such as popes and councils had marked out for destruction with the stigma of heresy, if the system itself was sound and good. It is certainly time, and much to be desired, that all such causes of animosity should be buried in oblivion, if we were not compelled, by the pertinacity of our opponents, to refer to them for the purpose of refuting misrepresentations, which they are still too industrious to propagate.

But the paramount question of the necessity and effects of the reformation must

be considered and determined in total distinction from the merits of individuals; and the secondary causes, of whatever kind, which operated to advance or impede its progress. It is not in the world, but in the church, that we must look for the condemnation or justification of it. If the previously existing state of religion, both in principle and practice, was conformable to the true spirit of Christianity; if essential truth was preserved, and not defiled by the intermixture of falsehood, and additions of human invention; if articles of faith were not imposed as necessary to salvation, for which the support of divine authority is nowhere to be found; if the modes of worship used in the church were pure and spiritual; if the sacraments appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ were faithfully ministered according to his institution; if the doctrine of the gospel was truly preached, and *the faith once delivered to the saints* inculcated diligently and without disguise; then, indeed, whatever corruption of life and manners may have attached to the rulers of the church, we will admit that no adequate

cause existed for a perpetual separation from their communion.

But if the contrary to all these suppositions were true ; if, in the ages of ignorance which followed the downfal of the Roman empire and the extinction of learning, such depravations had either been introduced into religion through the policy of churchmen, or had imperceptibly crept in during that long period of darkness, that when the light of reason began again to dawn upon a benighted world, men became sensible of the deformity which through such causes had been brought upon religion, the necessity of reformation must be admitted by every lover of truth, who believes that religion is not the device of human policy, which may be changed and accommodated to the prevalent inclinations of men, but that it is, in very deed, of divine authority, and immutable in its doctrines and precepts ; and if, through the blindness or perverseness of the rulers of the world or the church, this necessary work could not be effected with universal consent, then, how much soever it may be the duty of Chris-

tians, in other cases, to avoid the causes of disunion, and to sacrifice all personal interests and feelings to the preservation of the church's peace, yet the truth and purity of religion, for the guardianship of which the church itself was founded, and ever exists, were not to be surrendered to the fear of disturbing its repose for a season. For unity without sincerity is not the unity which our Lord has enjoined upon his followers, and the sin of schism must for ever lie at the door of those who make acquiescence in gross and palpable error the condition of remaining in their communion; not of those who refuse to dissemble before God, and solemnly to profess concerning things of the highest and most awful moment, what in their inmost conscience they believe to be contrary to his word and will.

Upon these grounds the necessity of renouncing the church of Rome may be abundantly proved.

Nor was it necessary, as we have before observed, that the leaders of the reformation should be free from the errors and infirmities of human nature.

They pretended to no new revelation ; they came not, as it has been insincerely alleged by their adversaries, to plant a new religion in the world, but, by the application of that rule which the divine Wisdom has provided for the perpetual remedy against all corruptions through all ages, to free that which was planted at the first by Christ and the apostles, from the mass of extraneous and incongruous matter by which it had been darkened and overloaded, and to exhibit it again in that beauty of holiness and simplicity of truth, by which its influence over pious and candid minds is most firmly and beneficially established. To accomplish this, it was not necessary that the Almighty should raise up men endowed with supernatural powers, or exhibiting, in any way, proofs of an extraordinary mission from him. Nor did the reformers lay claim to such a character. Zeal, sincerity, and firmness, with a competent share of learning, and an intimate knowledge of holy scripture, were the especial qualifications which their undertaking demanded ; and the proof that they were

instruments in the hand of God for achieving the great work to which they had devoted all their energies, and for the sake of which they subjected themselves to evils from which the weakness of human nature shrinks, must be sought in the issue of their labours, and the restoration of religion which resulted from them ; not in their individual characters, nor in their mental or moral endowments. Indeed, whatever influence their personal qualities may have had upon the immediate success of their endeavours, that is at this time rather matter of historical curiosity than practical importance. While we venerate the characters of our martyred confessors, we build nothing upon their authority. We do not make our appeal to them for the decision of our religious controversies, but, after their example, to an infinitely higher jurisdiction. The foundations of our faith are precisely the same as they would have been, if preceding corruptions had never rendered reformation necessary. We prove nothing by their dictation, but by the rule of scripture only ; and our faith is *built* (as that of

the primitive church was) *upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*^s. Nor is the most holy cause of our religion desecrated, even if it can be proved that the temporal princes who espoused the reformation were determined by worldly reasons only.

We would fain believe, indeed, and have fair grounds for believing, that their motives in general were laudable and good. But whether in the part which they performed they were actuated by the policy of Jehu or the piety of Josiah, they were equally subservient to the cause of religion. They afforded the most essential assistance towards the removal of the evils which oppressed it, by resisting the pretensions of the pope, and shaking off his dominion; which, wherever it was maintained in unbroken force, rendered all attempts at reformation hopeless of success, and destructive to their authors. Death, confiscation, and imprisonment, were every where arrayed against them. They were hunted down

^s Eph. ii. 20.

as heretics on the one side, and devoted to destruction, as enemies to the civil authority, on the other ; and so long as the temporal and ecclesiastical powers were confederated by the bonds of a common interest against every attempt to correct error and remove corruption, the evil was without remedy. Whatever, therefore, the particular causes of their disagreement may have been, it was clearly for the advantage of true religion that a field was opened for its advocates by the mutual opposition of its enemies ; and far from its bringing reproach upon our cause, we have reason to bless God, and to admire the ways of his providence, who made those who least intended it instrumental to its advancement, by exciting the jealousy of the temporal sovereign against the encroachments of the spiritual usurper, and inflaming the rapacity of the one against the unhallowed exactions of the other.

The remaining objection to the reformation, which it was proposed at present to notice, relates to its effects ; which its adversaries assert to have been altogether in-

jurious to religion, and productive of nothing but anarchy and confusion; and in support of this charge, they rely chiefly upon the discrepancy of doctrine between the reformed churches in general, and the variations which have taken place in the confessions of faith set forth by some of them in particular at different periods.

This has been exhibited as a most triumphant argument against the reformation generally, and has been urged with great plausibility, and concocted with infinite artifice, by its most subtle and inveterate enemies, as a decisive termination of the controversy in their favour. They tell us that while protestants have almost as many different confessions of faith as there are different churches among them, catholic unity is every where preserved inviolable under the papal system, and that there is not an iota of difference between the adherents of the sovereign pontiff from “^h Ireland to “Chili, from Canada to India” and China; from whence they infer that their church is guided by the Holy Spirit, but that all

^h Milner, Part II. Letter 16.

who do not symbolize with it are given up to the spirit of delusion.

Formidable as this argument may look at first view, it will be evident, on a nearer inspection, that a weaker could hardly be constructed in support of a baseless cause. That this boasted unity does exist in the Romish church, we may admit without giving them any advantage; for all, in fact, which is proved by it, if true, is that which protestants have always objected to them as a reproach; i. e. that under their system submission to authority has been substituted for faith, and uniformity of ignorance preferred to the investigation of truth. And since the right of private judgment is exorcised among them, as something in its very nature monstrous and impious, it is no more to be wondered that no difference of opinion subsists where no man is allowed to have an opinion, than that the blind should not dispute concerning colours, nor the deaf concerning sounds; and it is for want of that wholesome spirit of discussion and inquiry, which is equally consistent with sincere piety and Christian liberty,

that popery has subsided into a stagnant pool of corruption, to which no gale from Heaven imparts motion, and which no healthful current pervades and purifies.

They glory in the total surrender of their reasoning faculties to their earthly head. They deem it a sufficient account of their faith “ⁱ to believe what the church believes,” and if we look into the constitution of the church, in the sense which they attribute to it, and trace the whole chain of dependence from the lowest link to the highest, we shall find at last that one fallible mortal vainly pretending to infallibility, thinks, believes, prescribes, and determines, in all points of religion, for every member of his communion; while they on their part receive whatever he ordains with the passive uniformity of instinct. According to the most recent and moderate ^k assertor of the pope’s pretensions in this country, “his judgment in all cases connected with religion is final.” He is in fact the living oracle of the church, the dictator of

ⁱ Milner, Part II. Letter 16.

^k Butler, Book of Roman Catholic Church, p. 122.

its faith, and the *Lord over God's heritage*, an assumption disallowed indeed by St. Peter, (1 Ep. v. 3.) from whom the Roman pontiffs audaciously pretend to derive their spiritual sovereignty ; and as if the knowledge of divine things was confined by geographical limits, and no more than a reflected ray of it shone on this side the Alps, we are told, without a blush, “¹that “when Rome has spoken, the cause is de-“terminated.”

That protestants, on the other hand, have too often abused the right of free judgment, is undoubtedly true, and greatly to be lamented. But which of the most excellent gifts of God has not been abused by the folly and perverseness of men ? and yet it has not been deemed necessary on that account by the divine Wisdom to withdraw them, or to impose any other than moral restraints on the use of them. And so it is in religion. For every gift of nature or grace we are responsible to the almighty Giver. They are talents committed to our charge, for the use of which we must one

¹ Butler, Book of Roman Catholic Church, p. 122.

day give account, and of none a more awful account, than of the right, or, to speak more properly, the duty of judging for ourselves concerning those things which we are required to believe and do, as the conditions of eternal salvation.

And though individuals may irreverently abuse it to their own great danger, their folly does not defeat the gracious purpose of God, nor make any sensible diminution of the aggregate good which through the right use of it accrues to religion.

Nor is it any disparagement to the reformation, that temporary or even permanent differences have subsisted between the reformed churches respectively, or that few if any of them have retained without variation the formal confessions which they adopted at their first separation from Rome. What has been said of the reformers individually may be equally applied to the reformed churches collectively. For neither do we claim infallibility, which we hold to be the prerogative of God alone, and such as cannot be assumed by human beings without extreme impiety.

It is therefore a futile objection to say, that some have given up, as uncertain or unnecessary, points which, in the heat of controversy, they viewed in a different light, or that they have not yet been able to come to a perfect agreement among themselves reciprocally concerning all things which they retain and deem of perpetual obligation.

Whoever will but candidly consider the nature of their differences will find, that they relate, for the most part, not to essential articles of Christian faith, but to abstruse and difficult points, concerning which it would always be most wise to reason with the greatest moderation, and to exercise the greatest mutual forbearance.

But when religious controversy occupied every mind, and the smallest shades of difference were magnified into importance by the heat of disputation, it was scarcely possible to leave such points untouched; and it is no just reproach to the protestant churches, that they have not been determined by all alike.

Perfect unanimity on subjects of so evanescent and subtle a nature is unattainable

in our present state of infirmity, and could only be the result of perfect knowledge, which is superior to all error, or of submissive ignorance, which indolently admits for truth whatever by assumed authority is boldly declared to be so. Speculative questions, however, were as vehemently and discordantly debated among the schoolmen before the reformation, as they have been by those who have adopted its principles since; and although they are now insisted upon as proofs that the protestant churches are disowned and forsaken of God, yet so long as those who were engaged in such disputes were agreed in submission to the authority of Rome, all minor differences were little regarded. But not only do these partial dissensions among protestants afford no dangerous ground of objection to their opponents; it may be even doubted whether the most perfect union among them could have produced equal benefit to religion.

The representations which history gives of the general ignorance of the people concerning religion before the reformation, are

too well attested to admit a doubt in the main, even if some particulars should be overcharged. For the same state of ignorance is still seen to keep its ground, where no form of Christianity is tolerated but that of the church of Rome. In those countries no ray of light is seen to pervade the gross darkness in which the body of the people are involved; but superstition retains an undiminished hold upon minds studiously kept in lethargic inactivity, and no alternative is left but unlimited credulity or total unbelief; while in protestant countries, by the natural consequences of discussion and inquiry, the knowledge of religion has been widely diffused, and an active zeal excited to extend its influence, and impart the means of instruction to every class of the community, so that ignorance is almost left without excuse; and without claiming a miraculous exertion of divine power in forwarding the reformation, we need not hesitate to affirm, that a blessing has visibly attended it, and that it has been proved by its fruits to be conducive to the glory of God and the happiness of man.

But our more immediate concern is the vindication of our own church against the calumnies with which it is still assailed by those whose corruptions it has renounced.

It is indeed a source of gratification, as well as a ground of confidence, to every sound member of the protestant episcopal church, established in this country, to observe how timid and reluctant its Roman Catholic adversaries are to engage in a contest of fair argument against it.

Its doctrines and discipline they feel to be unassailable, and it is chiefly through the sides of others that they seek to wound it. This uncandid policy, unworthy of a religious cause, has been pursued by the most subtle and inveterate of its adversaries from the time when our church obtained a final settlement to the present day. Availing themselves of the loose sense in which the name of Protestant is used, as the common designation of all those who reject the papal supremacy, and having culled together all the absurdities, follies, or impieties, of which the several sects calling themselves Protestants have been guilty, they charge

upon all collectively a participation of the same guilt ; and by means of this dishonest artifice, impute to us the corruptions of Arians, Socinians, Unitarians, and have not even blushed to attribute to us a common origin with Manicheans, and whatever else is most odious in the list of ancient and modern heresies. No doubt they have deemed it expedient, for the perpetuation of their own system, to raise such a mist of prejudice around us, as should deter their remaining adherents from looking into our principles, and judging for themselves ; and it is for the same reason that they presume to pronounce us excluded from the hopes of eternal salvation, to which they say that none can be admitted who are not comprised within the pale of their own church, unless (the sole exception which they allow) in the case of invincible ignorance¹. To those who have not this to plead for not seeking reconciliation with the church of Rome, they denounce, in the unregenerate spirit of blind uncharitableness, inevitable

¹ Roman Catholic Catechism ; Papal Bull of Indiction. Milner, Part III. Lett. 50, in conclusion.

perdition, from which neither faith, nor works, nor sufferings for Christ's sake, can deliver them ; while at the same time they acknowledge, and even urge it as an argument against them, that protestants are not guilty of the same unchristian arrogance in return^m. God forbid that we should ever cease to be entitled to an acquittal from the guilt of following such an example ! Our concern is not to render railing for railing, nor to arm against us the feelings of those whose reason, with God's blessing, we would much rather convince.

Abstaining, therefore, as much as may be from all such topics, and considering those against whom we argue as brethren in Christ, and adversaries only in the maintenance of what we conscientiously believe to be great and dangerous errors concerning some heads of that divine faith, in the general profession of which we are both agreed, I shall proceed, as I proposed, to a review of the most prominent of those causes which first rendered our separation from the church of Rome necessary, and which still render a

^m Milner, Part III. Lett. 50. Conclusion.

reunion with it utterly impossible. One preliminary objection which they uniformly urge against all protestant churches, and which, if valid in its full extent, would for ever be conclusive against all reformation, it may however be convenient previously to examine. And as this objection is intimately connected with some of the most obnoxious characteristics and inadmissible pretensions of the church of Rome, the examination of it will be but an apparent digression from the intended course of our argument ; while at the same time it will tend towards the conclusion at which we aim.

This shall form the main business of the next Lecture. Amen.

Note. The term “Papist,” sometimes, though rarely, occurring in these Lectures, to avoid circumlocution, is not applied with any intentional disrespect to the members of the church of Rome, who prefer being styled “Catholics.” But this appellation, in the exclusive sense in which they claim it, no well instructed protestant can ever concede to them. And after all, it seems rather inconsistent, that the professed adherents of the pope should object to be so designated. In like manner “Popery” is used for the sake of brevity, and at the same time as most properly characteristic of that form of Christianity, in which subjection to the pope is declared to be necessary to salvation.

LECTURE III.

MATTHEW x. 37, 38.

*He that loveth father or mother more than me
is not worthy of me : and he that loveth son or
daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
And he that taketh not his cross, and follow-
eth after me, is not worthy of me.*

THE preliminary objection advanced by papists against the reformation, to which I alluded at the close of my last Lecture, may be most conveniently considered in subordination to the principle asserted in the text. We there learn, from the figurative expressions of our Lord, thrice repeated with increasing emphasis, that there is no tie of nature so sacred or so tender, which must not give way to the demands of our duty towards him ; no sacrifice of worldly interest or security, which we may refuse to make, if such an evidence be required to prove that we are truly his disciples. And as he himself professed before

Pilate, that *the very end for which he came into the world was, that he might bear witness to the truth*, it clearly follows, that we cannot sincerely love him, if we are indifferent to the truth which he came to teach; or, if we suffer any worldly considerations to prevail upon us to reject it, or to continue in error, which we perceive to be such, especially if it be of such a nature as to vitiate our faith or worship, and at the same time so palpable, that the honest exercise of a plain understanding is sufficient to detect it.

It was therefore in vain for Jews or Pagans to be, as we read in the gospel that many of the former were, secretly his disciples, while they were restrained by regard to their temporal interests or the world's opinion, from avowing their faith, and acknowledging him before men for their Master. So likewise in this maturity of the religion of which he was then the preacher, it must be in the highest degree dangerous, from the same interested inducements, to dissemble our conviction, and to decide between the conflicting claims of different

churches or sects, in favour of that which is recommended by secular advantage only, or party prejudice, or any other imaginable motive of preference, except the unfeigned love of Christian truth.

The fervours of enthusiasm are at the same time not less to be guarded against than worldly affections ; and our Christian liberty must be exercised with cautious humility and dispassionate moderation.

Good intentions are no excuse for presumptuous ignorance attempting to stretch itself beyond its measure ; and it is utterly inconsistent with any rational notion of true piety to stir up dissension for trivial causes, and to hazard the interruption of that peace and charity, which the commands of our divine Master, and the exhortations of his apostles, require all Christians to cultivate, unless when the still more important obligation of maintaining the essential doctrines of Christianity whole and undefiled, cannot otherwise be fulfilled.

Then only the evils of discord and temporary confusion are to be encountered, in the hope that they may be again healed,

and that all who are sincere in faith and in the study after truth, may in God's good time be reunited in the undissembled profession of it.

It is only by a faithful and conscientious application of these principles that a dutiful and necessary interruption of religious communion can be distinguished from sectarian levity and presumption.

Human passions and worldly reasonings must not be allowed to have any weight in determining the judgment concerning spiritual things. Christianity, if allowed to have its proper influence in human affairs, by purifying the affections, calming the passions, and correcting the moral sentiments of men, is not only consistent with their temporal happiness, but is alone capable of advancing it to the highest degree of perfection compatible with our present state of existence. But to effect this, it must lead, not follow; it must be to things temporal what the rational soul is to the body, the pervading and governing principle; and any attempt to render it subservient to political convenience or civil institutions, while

it can have no other consequence than that of defiling its purity and diminishing its efficacy, is but a modification of that sinful insincerity, against which our Saviour warns us, of attempting *to serve God and mammon*. No sincere and sober-minded Christian, therefore, will ever be influenced by such considerations in embracing the form of faith and doctrine, through which he hopes to obtain everlasting salvation ; and far from catching at frivolous pretexts for leaving that which he has previously believed to be the true and acceptable way of serving God, he will adopt the resolution of so doing rather as a painful alternative, upon a full and deliberate conviction that he can no longer safely or innocently continue in it. Upon these principles our own renunciation of the church of Rome must be judged.

If the grounds of our disagreement are of questionable certainty, or relate to things indifferent or of small moment, the sin of schism, with all its contingent and probable consequences of heresy and uncharitableness, rests upon us. If, on the contrary,

the maintenance of the vital purity of our religion demanded our secession from that church, it was then an act of indispensable duty to adopt it, and in perfect unison with the fundamental maxim of *obeying God rather than man*, and shewing our love for Christ by *keeping his commandments*, instead of putting our trust in beings like ourselves, and subjecting our faith to their dictation.

The force of historic truth has compelled the most strenuous advocates of Rome to acknowledge that many abuses and deprivations of religion existed in the church, when first Luther broke the slumbers of the Christian world; and while they load the reformers with obloquy, they virtually admit the necessity of reformation. The admissions of individuals, however, are not wanted to strengthen our cause.

Before its unexpected commencement in Germany, reformation had already been declared necessary by the highest authorities in the church itself, even by popes and councils; and when that crisis had arrived, it was demanded, with an almost unanimous

cry through every nation in Europe, as well those who finally adhered to the papal power, as those which renounced it, as the sole remedy for the evils of the church ; and that, too, of no narrow compass or superficial character, but such as, in the language of the time, should comprehend both the “head and members,” and be applied to every point of doctrine and discipline. It is equally certain that nothing but the dread of a general rejection of his authority, coupled with a hope of allaying, by an appearance of equity, the irritation which was becoming every day more violent, and averting the impending danger, at length determined the ^apope, who at that time governed the church, (himself one of the most crafty and subtle of men,) in deference to the earnest solicitations and menacing remonstrances of the most powerful princes of Christendom, to call a general council of the church at Trent, for the declared purpose of extinguishing heresies and reforming the church. But whoever shall review the proceedings of that servile assembly,

^a Paul III.

composed for the most part of the creatures and dependents of the pope, and influenced by him in all their measures, will clearly perceive that two things only were seriously aimed at, and effectually accomplished by it ; first, the prevention of that reformation, which was the professed object of their meeting ; and, secondly, the plenary confirmation of the pope's power, wherever it was still acknowledged ; although the diminution of it was considered by all, who were sincerely concerned for the welfare of religion^b, and as the event has fully proved, most justly considered, to be the first and most necessary step towards the removal of every corruption, and the redress of every grievance.

But while the advocates of the church of Rome are constrained to admit that many evils had crept into it which needed correction, they utterly deny to those who attempted to apply the remedy, the merit of good intention, and attribute all their efforts in opposition to the sovereign pontiff

^b Father Paul's History of the Council of Trent, p. 550. ed. 1676, Brents translation.

to an ambitious and disobedient spirit, excited to such an undertaking by the spiritual enemy of mankind. They will not allow the possibility of a separation from the church of Rome ever being either necessary or justifiable under any circumstances ; since, as they pretend, the promise of infallibility, exclusive salvation, and various other high and inalienable privileges belong to it, so that to forsake its communion, and to refuse submission to its authority, is nothing less than to rebel against God, to renounce Christ, and to incur a more dreadful guilt than that of the most heinous transgression of divine or human laws, from the consequences of which the combination of all moral and religious virtue can afford no exemption.

Assuming, but not attempting to prove by reason or the evidence of fact, that their church enjoys those singular and exclusive prerogatives by the perpetual gift of God, they argue, *à priori*, that in all controversies of religion she must be right, and all who oppose her wrong ; that although the relaxation of ecclesiastical discipline, or the

corruption of manners, or abuses in the temporal administration of their church, might have required correction, yet in matters of faith and doctrine that she could not err ; and therefore that the protestants, in renouncing their allegiance to her on account of imputed errors and corruptions of religion, were guilty of the deadly sins of heresy and schism.

This is the preliminary objection to the reformation, which it was my intention to notice upon the present occasion ; not that it deserves notice from any value of its own, nor that it can be necessary to expose its fallacy to those who have the scriptures in their hands, and are permitted to read and understand them in their plain and obvious sense ; but because the groundless assumptions on which it is founded are so characteristic of the general spirit of the Romish church, and prove so clearly the utter hopelessness of internal reformation in a church so constituted, which by its own extravagant pretensions is tied to the defence of the grossest errors. In opposition to the schismatic conduct, as they denote it, of the

protestant reformers, popish writers tell us of the pious boldness and holy severity with which St. Bernard, St. Francis, and other canonized luminaries of their church, arraigned the vices of the several ages in which they lived, neither respecting the persons of the great and powerful, nor fearing to incur their displeasure by openly rebuking them; who yet were never carried away by the intemperance of their zeal to attempt a separation between the head and members of the church, but were distinguished by their dutiful obedience to the apostolic see, and their exertions to promote its honour and authority.

Now admitting for argument's sake, that the praises bestowed on these celebrated personages, who in times of overwhelming ignorance and gross immorality were distinguished by superior piety and knowledge, were justly merited, we may yet be permitted to ask, what were the fruits of their endeavours to reform the world, whether by reproof, instruction, or example? Did they change the face of religion and morals in any one nation? Did they in any

one region of the Christian world exterminate the superstition by which the whole was overspread? or were they in their own persons free from its influence? or was their piety of that pure and enlightened character, which may be considered as the legitimate offspring, and correct illustration of those spiritual doctrines, which our Lord and his apostles delivered to mankind? That God never so totally forsook his church, but that in the worst and darkest ages individuals arose, who did honour to human nature, and exhibited in their lives the power of divine grace, is a truth which, as I have before remarked ^c, we may admit in its fullest extent, without the least prejudice to the cause of the reformation, or at all strengthening the hands of its adversaries.

Without doubt there were many such, men at least of pious minds and good intentions, in proportion to the measure of their knowledge; just as in the darkest periods of states and empires, we sometimes meet with individuals of exalted virtue, who

^c First Lecture.

would have done honour to their best and most splendid eras. But these rare exceptions do not at all affect the main question, which is not to be determined by solitary particulars, but by a comprehensive view of the aggregate whole. And yet even of those, whose religious virtues are so highly extolled by Roman Catholics, the names are scarcely to be found in general history, so little was the state of the world influenced by them; but the monuments of their praise must be sought for the most part, in the obscurity and uncertainty of monastic records.

The efforts, too, of their zeal were principally employed in renovating the decayed discipline of preexisting religious orders, or in founding new ones; which, indeed, was as much an object of emulation with the more fervent spirits of those ages, as the founding of new sects has been with similar characters in later times; but the general reformation of the public religion rarely if ever entered into their contemplation. Nor was the example of the austeries which they affected^c, too nearly resembling those of certain orders

^c Vide *passim* Butler's Lives of the Saints.

of pagan priests^d, from whom it is difficult to believe that they were not originally borrowed, likely to make a favourable impression on the minds of men in general, or to contribute to the advancement of religion, the perfection of which was made to consist in such self-inflicted sufferings. For such acts of religion, if they could deserve the name, are utterly incompatible with the ordinary duties of life, the due performance of which constitutes so essential a part of true religion ; and if worthy of imitation, could be imitated only in the seclusion of the cloister, to which, indeed, all ideas of piety in those dark ages seem to have been wholly confined. Those professed ascetics were moreover the most strenuous assertors of the pope's universal supremacy, and whatever dogma or mandate was issued from Rome, they were ever ready to receive without question, and to propagate with the most sedulous efforts of their zeal.

The members of the monastic orders were then, as they still are in whatever country

^d Barefooted Carmelites, &c. ἀνιπτόποδες, χαμαιεῦναι, &c. Hom. Il. XVI. 235.

they have retained their influence, or regained a footing, the indefatigable instruments of the papal power, which they make it their pride to strengthen and extend, and consider the advancement of it identified with the reputation of their fraternity, and consequently with their own individual importance.

But none of the inveterate errors and corruptions of religion could be corrected by men bound by such ties, originating, as the worst of them did, in the express authority of their church, or consecrated by its sanction ; and when we farther take into the account the powerful bonds by which every member of that church is held in subjection to his spiritual chief, how much soever reason and conscience may revolt at particular doctrines or practices, it is evidently impossible that any one should openly dare to call them in question, till he first felt himself emancipated from that bondage ^e.

^e The failure of the Jansenists is a decisive proof of the impossibility of reforming the church of Rome, while the sovereignty of the pope is acknowledged.

Reformation, therefore, must have been for ever renounced as hopeless, or it must have been undertaken and perfected in defiance of that power, whose interest and authority were directly concerned in the perpetuation of every abuse which it had once sanctioned, and which however gross it could not condemn, without at the same time renouncing its claim to infallibility, which in less enlightened ages was the palladium of its strength, but is now a mill-stone round its neck. Of this we have the most conclusive evidence in the undeniable fact, that not one of the religious corruptions, or unscriptural doctrines, or offensive pretensions, imagined, and asserted by the pope or church of Rome in any former age, however injurious to its present interest in countries where that church is not predominant, has ever to this day been openly condemned or disclaimed; and modes of worship are still retained, of which the more enlightened of those who yet observe them are evidently ashamed, and because they may not confess an error, strive to palliate them by sophistical explanations and

groundless apologies ; but are equally unable to defend them by argument against the sober objections of sincere Christians, or the profane irony of infidels. It is altogether incredible that among the multitudes in different nations, which still profess unalterable allegiance to the see of Rome, there should none be found, acute and enlightened in other respects as many of her most distinguished partizans have shewn themselves, who are really sensible of her gross corruptions in faith and worship, and how necessary it is to the preservation of true religion, that these corruptions should at length be removed. Yet no such sentiment is avowed, but the same debasing superstition is outwardly acquiesced in by all alike, and no medium is allowed in the papal system between the unconditional surrender of the understanding, nay, the very renunciation both of sense and reason, and the guilt of infidelity. The sole measure of right on every disputed point is the decision of the church ; her judgment must never be impugned, and to presume to look beyond it, and to appeal

to scripture against the decrees of councils, or the judicial sentence of the living occupant of the papal chair, would still subject the disputant who should presume so far to exceed the narrow bounds prescribed to his inquiries, to the imputation of heresy and the public condemnation of his opinions ; and in the times preceding the reformation, would have brought upon him far more formidable consequences than mere ecclesiastical censures. In fact, the papal power is still secured against all internal attempts at reformation, by the worldly minded indifference or superstitious timidity of its adherents ; while by its own policy it has debarred itself from the correction of abuses, however indefensible, and the adoption of improvements, however dictated by the increase of knowledge and the altered circumstances of the world.

It has taken up a position from which there is no retreat. “ It is infallible, and “ cannot err ; it has alone the perfect know-“ ledge of the truth, and cannot be deceiv-“ ed ; while all other churches have depart-“ ed from it, whereinsoever they have de-

" viated from that system of doctrine and
" discipline, which that of Rome, by her
" assumed right to command, requires all
" Christians to receive and maintain." She
is, to use her own phraseology, the mother
and mistress of all churches, from which
she exacts by divine appointment the im-
plicit obedience of dutiful children. She
solves their doubts and represses their dis-
putes by her paramount authority, but does
not condescend to reason with them, nor
suffer any point, which has ever been set-
tled by her decision to be called in ques-
tion. She challenges to herself all the pro-
mises of Christ to the universal church, and
denies any participation of them to such
Christians as are not in communion with
her, although they may never have even
heard her name. She asserts that the gift
of the Holy Spirit, which was, according to
the gracious promise of our Lord, to pre-
serve and enlighten his people for ever
with the saving knowledge of the truth, is
exclusively hers; and that to her alone it
belongs, in consequence of this incommuni-
cable privilege, to expound whatever is ob-

scure, and to fix whatever is undefined, in all things relating to religion.

By means of these inordinate pretensions she maintains an absolute dominion over the consciences of those, who believe her entitled to assert them ; and she can at any time silence their remonstrances, if they should presume to think any thing erroneous in her doctrine or worship, by simply offering them the alternative of silent acquiescence in what they disapprove, or excommunication ; which to the apprehension of a true Roman Catholic is equivalent to the sentence of eternal perdition ; since nothing is more carefully instilled into their minds from early infancy, or more sedulously repeated, whenever an opportunity can be found for recurring to it, than that impious pretension of their church, that even the merits of the death of Christ will not avail to the salvation of those who do not believe that the bishop of Rome is his vicar upon earth, and obey him accordingly.

If, therefore, the reformers were not prepared to concede to such extravagant claims,

separation was unavoidable. If they had conceded to them, their reformation must have ended, as all partial attempts had done before; and they would have stood condemned by their own admission of those charges of heresy and schism, which the abettors of the papal power had heaped upon them. The unbending arrogance with which the Romish hierarchy assert their pretensions to dictate in religion to the whole Christian world, is a remarkable feature in the policy of that church, and was never more strikingly displayed, than at the crisis of the reformation; of which, *if the thing had not been from God*, it appears in the highest degree probable, that the issue might have been prevented, by a small show of equity on the part of the church of Rome, from which it is evident that no secession was contemplated, till the violence and injustice, which were employed to extinguish the first efforts towards the correction of ecclesiastical abuses, had irritated those who were so harshly treated, and at the same time convinced them that their personal safety, as well as the final success

of their undertaking, required a total rejection of that spiritual domination, to which so many states and kingdoms had till then yielded implicit obedience.

The ground of controversy was thus continually widened, and animosity inflamed, by the arrogance with which it was conducted on the part of successive popes, who rejected with judicial blindness every conciliatory proceeding, and thought it more consistent with the character which they assumed, of vicegerents of the divine Saviour of the world and common fathers of the faithful, to arm subjects and sovereigns against each other, and to stir up nation against nation, than to reason where they had been accustomed to command, to exterminate, than endeavour to persuade.

And if an argument was wanted at this day to convince sober and impartial men, that the honours assumed and the titles claimed by the popes could not rightfully belong to them, a simple enumeration of the atrocities instigated, abetted, and sanctioned by most of those who wore the triple crown successively for the first century after

the reformation, and in many partial instances of much later date, for the purpose of extirpating what they call heresy, would seem to be most conclusive; and the infatuation of those who still look up to them as the living representatives of that Saviour whose first advent was accompanied with the songs of angels, proclaiming '*glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men,*' and who professed of himself, that *his kingdom was not of this world*, while they have the opportunity of contrasting their actions and professions with the letter and spirit of the gospel, is to be regarded with equal astonishment and regret.

But the impolitic violence with which the reformation was opposed cannot be imputed to the mere offended jealousy of despotic power. In general, there is nothing in which the court of Rome is less deficient, than subtle refinement and dexterity in the management of its own interests, and the maintenance of its own pretensions. In many disputes with sovereigns attached to

^f Luke ii. 14.

its communion, when it has not been able to obtain all at which it aimed, it has known how to moderate its demands, and to concede with a good grace, rather than risk the total loss of its authority. But in the controversies arising out of the reformation, besides the little importance which it attached to the persons of the reformers, men till then unknown to the world, and who might well be presumed incapable of making head against a power with which the most mighty princes in Christendom had as yet been unable to contend, without the certainty of ultimate humiliation or ruin, it was rendered more precipitate by the conscious unsoundness of the cause which it had to defend, and dreaded much more an appeal to reason and scripture, by which the baseless foundation of its greatness might be laid open to a long deluded world, than any external shock to which it might be exposed, without touching the secret of its strength ; and a partial dismemberment of its spiritual empire was less to be dreaded, than a discussion of principles, which would have endangered the stability of the whole.

And accordingly, when the ambassadors of some protestant princes in Germany, in deference to the wishes of the emperor Charles Vth, who hoped that the religious differences of his empire might be composed through the means of amicable conference, had repaired to the council of Trent, it was haughtily declared by the pope's legate, who presided in it, “^gthat it was not to be suffered, that either they or any other protestants should present their doctrine, much less be admitted to defend it: that it was the office of the fathers” (i. e. the agents and dependents of the pope, and deputies of popish princes and states, of whom the council was composed) “to examine their doctrine taken out of their own books, and condemn that which did deserve it.”

In this imperious and unaccommodating spirit the pretended successors of St. Peter acted towards the reformers in every country; and they might well vindicate themselves against the charge of schism, urged

^g Council of Trent, 338.

against them by their adversaries, in the words of that holy apostle and the rest to the council at Jerusalem, when they had forbidden them to speak in the name of Jesus, ^b *Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* Or as when the same prohibition was repeated, with threats in case of continued disobedience; *We ought to obey God, rather than men,* and consequently to forsake the society of men who would not suffer them, according to the dictates of their own conscience, to fulfil that duty.

On these grounds we may be fully satisfied, that the separation of our church from that of Rome was originally necessary and unavoidable, unless every thing valuable in religion was to be sacrificed to avert it; and that the continuance of that separation is on the same grounds equally necessary at the present day; and so long as that church shall persist in retaining her corruptions, and refuse to see, and understand, and be converted from the error of her ways, it

^b Acts iv. 19.

will be impossible that ⁱ *those who have been once enlightened, and have tasted the good word of God,* should reenter her fold, without the abandonment of every principle, which can render the best services of a human being acceptable in the sight of God.

Sometimes, however, forbearing to insist upon the characteristic principles and high pretensions of their church, according to which Roman Catholics are bound to contend that a reformation of religion never could be necessary, and still more, that a rejection of that church, which claims an universal supremacy over the household of faith, could in no circumstances be justifiable; her more politic advocates will have recourse to a more plausible course of argument, and insinuate that the real differences between their church and ours respect things of comparatively small moment, and such as in times of less excitement, and disjoined from temporal considerations, would not have been deemed of sufficient moment to produce such an issue; and consequently, that as those adventi-

ⁱ Hebrews vi. 4.

tious causes of alienation have now yielded to the gradual operation of time, their effects should cease also, and the breach between us be at length made up by a tacit acknowledgment of our error, and a reunion with the supreme head of the Christian world, and so the divisions healed, by which our common faith is endangered.

With a policy not ill adapted to an age in which men who aspire to be wise in matters of little or no moment, yet think it no reproach to be ignorant of the first principles of religion, they will remind us of various circumstances which might conduce to such a reconciliation ; “that we hold in common with them the same apostolic faith conceived in the same form of words, “that we use not a few of the same prayers, that we retain the same apostolic form “of church government, and observe the appointed festivals of the primitive church.”

That these are important points of agreement, we can have no hesitation to admit. We rather accept it as the testimony of an adversary, thus claiming relationship with us, that in the conduct of our reformation

we have been guilty of no rash innovations, and have indulged no blind antipathies ; that we have not changed that which stands on the ground of divine command or apostolic institution, to make way for fanciful improvements, or to accommodate religion either to state convenience or popular prejudice. But, fully admitting the fidelity of this representation, we shall yet perceive, that it leaves wholly untouched the substantial causes of our disunion with the church of Rome ; and consequently that it forms no argument for our return to her communion, though certainly it affords a strong one, even upon their own shewing, for them to reconsider their reasons for refusing to accede to ours.

On our part, we do not charge them with having renounced any of the essential articles of Christian faith, or mutilated *the form of sound words*, in which the profession of it has been made in the church of God, from the earliest ages of Christianity. But we do charge them with having made such additions to the truth, and introduced, without any admissible authority, such doc-

trines and modes of worship, as in a great degree to change the essential character of the Christian religion, and to render it a vehicle of darkness and superstition, instead of that, which in its native purity it ever must be, a fountain of light and truth, diffusing its brightness on every side, and, together with the increase of knowledge, progressively improving the moral state of mankind. We charge them with teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, and exercising over the consciences of Christians such a dominion as the divine Author of our religion has nowhere empowered his disciples to assume; and requiring, under pain of eternal reprobation, an implicit assent to many things which cannot be proved to be true, and to some which are demonstrably false and inconsistent with the letter and spirit of our religion.

The cause of truth may be not less injured by addition, than by suppression; and in the Old Testament we find the same prohibition against ^k *adding to, or diminishing from, the commands of God.*

^k Deut. xii. 32.

Nearly all the corruptions which protestants impute to the church of Rome come from this source, from the presumption of adding to that which they believe already perfect; and the main difference between the two parties ultimately resolves itself into this,—that Romanists have a double rule of faith and morals, scripture and tradition, which they call the unwritten word of God, while protestants acknowledge as such the holy scripture or written word only. By this alone protestants contend that every doctrine must be tried, and every article of faith established, which is enjoined upon Christians as necessary to salvation. Those of Rome, on the other hand, while they admit that tradition, or the unwritten word, must not be contrary to the written, yet claim an equal authority for it, and contend that scripture is deficient in many important particulars, and in others unintelligible without the help of tradition. Tradition, being thus assumed for the key of scripture, is in effect exalted above it; and Romish ¹writers, of the high-

¹ Bellarmine, Milner, &c. &c.

est eminence for orthodoxy and skill in the principles of their church, have not hesitated to assert, that the written word of God was neither perfect nor absolutely necessary, and that tradition, or the unwritten word, might have sufficed for the knowledge and maintenance of our religion without it.

We see, therefore, notwithstanding the agreement between the protestant episcopal church and that of Rome in the first principles of religion, a church government, there yet remains a wide difference between them, concerning points of great importance to faith and practice. Though starting from the same goal, we proceed on diverging roads, and under the conduct of different guides, Scripture and Tradition; and it is not to be wondered that we arrive at very different conclusions.

But the subject of tradition is far too important to be passed over with a brief notice. It shall therefore form the main subject of the next Lecture.

Suffice it for the present to observe, that whatever may be pretended by the enemies

of our church, or inconsiderately allowed by its ill-informed friends, concerning its resemblance to that of Rome, that resemblance consists only in such particulars as are necessary to Christian faith, or in such institutions as are common to all apostolic churches, or in such things as are venerable by ancient usage, and conducive to piety and holiness. But here the resemblance ceases ; and those points on which we differ, are such as the church of Rome has presumed to decide by her own authority alone, or that of tradition, whatever it be, without the sanction of scripture.

And in support of this assertion, we have not only the evidence of legitimate deduction from the writings of her most esteemed theologians, but the express declaration of her highest authority in that addition to the Apostles' Creed, which, subsequent to the reformation, she imposed, under the pain of anathema, upon all her members; and from which, if all other testimony were wanting, the necessity of that reformation might be irrefragably proved.

It is difficult, indeed, to contemplate this

prodigious monument of infatuated presumption, without calling to mind the wish of Job, *Oh that mine adversaries had written a book!*

If from the time of the reformation to the present day the church of Rome had maintained a cautious reserve, and silently corrected her most glaring abuses, it might at length have come to be doubted, whether in the beginning the protestants had truth and reason on their side : but when in the plenitude of her arrogance, having escaped the first shock of the reformation, and reestablished her spiritual power more firmly than ever in those nations of Europe which were then accounted most considerable, she put forth that supplementary exposition of her faith ; in equal contempt of reason and scripture, she gave evidence against herself of the justice of their accusations, which no sophistry can ever shake, no artifice elude. By this the enemies of the truth are convicted out of their own mouths, and that which was intended to add impregnable strength to the citadel of superstition, must, unless the scripture be

indeed, as some of them have reproachfully called it, a dead letter, in time effect its subversion.

Thus, we trust, has the final triumph of pure religion been prepared, through the counsels which were devised to extinguish it for ever; and the policy of those who studied to perpetuate delusion, for the purpose of preserving their ill-gotten and impiously abused power over the ignorance and fear of mankind, will have turned to their own confusion.

For which, and for all his spiritual mercies, let us bless God, ^m *who taketh the wise in their own craftiness*, and by his holy word ⁿ *giveth light and understanding to the simple*. Amen.

^m Job v. 13.

ⁿ Psalm cxix. 130.

LECTURE IV.

MATTHEW xv. 9.

But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

WE come now to that which I observed in my last Discourse to be the great head of difference between our church and that of Rome, and under which almost all other differences of substantive importance are virtually comprehended, “the authority of ‘tradition;’—which Romanists elevate to an equal rank in all respects with the written word of God, while we reject it in its primary sense as apocryphal and superfluous; and in its application, as a rule of faith and doctrine, superlatively pernicious.

It is scarcely possible, in entering upon this subject, not to remark the near analogy between the practice of the modern church of Rome and that of the Jews, in the time of our Saviour, in respect to tradition.

The Jews employed it to explain away

the precepts of the Mosaic law; Romanists avail themselves of it, to put their own construction upon holy scripture, which they affirm to be insufficient, and in many passages unintelligible, without it. The effect too of tradition, so applied, seems to have been in both cases essentially the same, that of diminishing the authority of scripture, and consequently of weakening the influence of true religion. The strong condemnation of it therefore among the Jews, by our divine Master, *who knew what was in man*, the weakness of his judgment and his proneness to err, ought at least to render all who profess themselves his disciples very cautious of incurring a similar censure.

Religion, when it presumes to venture beyond the limits which the wisdom of God has appointed, of necessity departs from the standard of truth, and degenerates into superstition; and human tradition superadded to divine revelation, like a parasite plant, exhausts the health and vigour, and destroys the beauty, of the stem to which it has attached itself.

The traditions of the church of Rome, in relation to scripture, if tried by their fruits, will be found to form no exception to this rule. In the pope's Creed, presumptuously subjoined to that of the Apostles, towards the end of the same century in which the reformation had begun, and in obedience to his mandate submissively received throughout the Romish church, the belief in tradition with good reason occupies the first place, inasmuch as it forms the sole basis of those corruptions of faith and worship which are imposed upon the consciences of all who still believe that the pope is the vicegerent of the Son of God on earth, and that salvation is the exclusive prerogative of the church which owns him for its head.

The subject of tradition has indeed been pronounced by the most able divines to be replete with difficulty; and I have too much reason to apprehend that I may be censured for presumption in attempting to handle it; but yet I feel it to be of such vital importance to the right understanding of the whole question between our

church and that of Rome, that, however diffident of my ability to do it justice, I cannot, consistently with the design of these Lectures, leave it untouched. It is not, however, my intention to entangle myself in unprofitable intricacies, or to attempt to unravel the sophistical subtleties with which Romanists have studied to embarrass the argument; but to shew, as I trust, upon plain and substantial grounds, that it is our duty decidedly to reject it in its most important aspects, and where we admit it in any sense, to do so, as our church has done, with scrupulous caution and reserve.

To many among the audience which I am addressing this must be a trite subject, and I fear that I have nothing to offer which may be worthy of their attention; but, if not materially incorrect, it may have some utility for those who are less advanced in theological studies; and if it should but have the effect of exciting their attention to a question of great, and, under existing circumstances, I may add, though without any political allusion, of growing import-

ance, my wishes will not be wholly disappointed, nor my humble endeavours in the cause of true religion altogether abortive.

Now the tradition of the church of Rome is distinguished by her theologians into three several kinds, divine, apostolical, and ecclesiastical ; the first of which, the divine, they assert to have been delivered by our Saviour himself to the apostles, but not committed to writing by them ; the second, the apostolical, that which was taught by the apostles to their converts, but is not contained in their epistles, yet in the oral communication of which they were not without the assistance of the Holy Spirit ; the third, the ecclesiastical, they define to consist of things established by the usage of the church, and constitutions, whether written or unwritten, concerning rites and ceremonies, ordinances, forms of worship and discipline ; which, though not of equal validity with the two former, they hold to be perpetually and universally binding, unless repealed by the same authority by which they were at first enacted. The divine and apostolical, the one proceeding,

as it is asserted, from the immediate dictation of Christ himself, the other from the suggestion of the Holy Spirit, are esteemed of equal authority, both being in fact divine, and derived from the same origin, in ways but little differing from each other, and together constitute a rule of faith which they call the unwritten word, and to which the same deference is demanded as to the written word of God.

This, therefore, is the tradition which all protestants unanimously reject, as destitute of all proof of authenticity, and on principles of reason utterly inadmissible. Ecclesiastical traditions our church (in her thirty-fourth Article) admits under certain limitations, and in a sense materially different from that in which the church of Rome understands them ; asserting the right of every national church to ordain, change, or abolish such things, as it may seem best, provided that *all things be done to edifying*.

Romanists are at least consistent with themselves in asserting the insufficiency of holy Scripture ; since on no other ground

can the necessity of that kind of tradition on which articles of faith and doctrine are founded, with any semblance of reason or probability be maintained ; and happily for the cause of truth, many of the articles which they pretend to found upon it are such, that without further examination of its claims to our acceptation, we should be justified in rejecting it altogether, as spurious and unworthy of the Holy Spirit, to whose guidance and suggestion they ascribe it. But omitting for the present any particular notice of these Articles, and weighing according to its own merit whatever is advanced by the principal advocates of tradition in general, we shall find it utterly unsupported by such evidence as should induce us to receive it ; while, on the other hand, we shall clearly perceive in the whole system connected with it, and the purposes to which it is applied by the church of Rome, and even in the arguments adduced in favour of it by her most eminent controversialists, enough to convince us that it is our bounden duty to refuse our assent to it, and to regard it with the greatest sus-

picion. Most justly does our church assert^a, “that whatever is necessary to salvation is contained in holy scripture,” and the same was undoubtedly the sense of every branch of the universal church, before it had departed from primitive truth and sincerity.

In proof of this we need not have recourse to the writings of the fathers, to ecclesiastical history, or controversial argument. An easier, and at the same time a more satisfactory decision of the point at issue, seems to lie within the reach of every man moderately instructed in the principles of his religion. The three creeds, which our truly apostolic church has wisely and dutifully retained, supply an incontrovertible testimony, which neither party can hesitate to acknowledge.

To these, therefore, our first appeal against the authority of tradition shall be made.

That most venerable symbol of our faith, which we call the Apostles' Creed, not be-

^a Art. VI.

cause it was composed by the apostles, such as we now have it, but because of the apostolic doctrine contained in it, has undoubtedly descended to us from very high antiquity ; and when it was first drawn up, it cannot be doubted that it was intended to express every head of faith which was then by its authors, and the universal church which adopted it, deemed necessary to salvation. The Nicene Creed expresses, only in a more enlarged form, and with something more of technical precision, to guard against heretical sophisms, the same propositions as the Apostles' Creed. And, lastly, the Athanasian, which in a later age had been deemed necessary, as a more full and specific enunciation of the same articles of belief which had been more briefly professed in the other two, to serve as an additional security against the continued attempts of heresy to pervert the truth, contains, like them, not a single article which is not proved by the authority of holy scripture, in its plain declarations, or in just and necessary inferences from them.

At the several periods when these creeds

were compiled, it cannot be admitted as a possible supposition, that any thing was left untouched which was judged necessary to the completion of a true and perfect Christian faith; nor in reality is any point of theology omitted in them, by which our religion is essentially distinguished from Judaism, Deism, or Paganism. It would have been utterly inconsistent with every purpose for which such summaries of faith are designed, to suppress any article which a Christian is bound to know and believe to his soul's health, and by a diligent attention to which he can alone be preserved from those heretical fallacies by which, in all ages, the faith of believers has been assailed.

But what room do we here find for the interference of tradition, either to vindicate or elucidate the articles of our creed, every clause of which is either expressly declared in the written word of God, or plainly deducible from it? And for the more enlarged explication of what is there more concisely affirmed, the ordinary methods of teaching, such as are proper to the office of a Chris-

tian ministry, which appeals to that word only for the correctness of its instructions, and assumes to itself no authority above or independent of it, are abundantly sufficient, with the grace of God, without having recourse to the auxiliary sanction of an unwritten revelation.

If, therefore, the several articles of the ancient creeds of the church are satisfactorily proved from scripture alone, and no extraneous testimony is required for their support, it seems necessarily to follow, that tradition is altogether superfluous in the construction and defence of a pure and apostolic faith. And, as it is inconsistent with perfect wisdom to do any thing in vain, nor do we see any similar redundancy in the economy either of nature or grace, by which a plurality of instruments is employed to effect a single purpose, for which one is evidently sufficient, we are justified by these considerations, independent of its intrinsic defects, in rejecting tradition altogether, as a ground or criterion of faith.

The next great purpose of our religion, after that of inculcating a right faith to-

wards God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and right notions concerning the work of our redemption by the joint operation of the three Persons in the Godhead, is to promote holiness of life, to teach men their duty towards God and each other, and by adequate sanctions to excite them to the diligent performance of it. Here, then, we have another test for ascertaining the necessity, and consequently the authenticity of tradition; since, according to our argument, if not necessary, it cannot be admitted for true.

Again, therefore, we demand, with equal confidence, is the written word of God sufficient for this second purpose of genuine religion? Do we not find in the collective volume of holy scripture the great principles of every duty, whether religious, social, or personal, set forth with such perspicuity that every individual of ordinary understanding may comprehend them, and enforced with such sanctions that none but infidels can fail to feel their force? And, lastly, is any thing more required to give them full effect upon the minds of a Chris-

tian congregation, than that they should be diligently explained and applied to practice, by the preaching and exhortation of the ministers of Christ, ordained for that very end? To these queries it is impossible to anticipate a dissentient answer. Concerning the vital principles of practical religion, in which all men are equally interested, there is nothing obscure or ambiguous in the Christian code. Even infidels have professed to admire the morality of the gospel, while they have refused to humble their pride to its divine authority, and have acknowledged it to be, as a discipline of life and manners, superior to the most renowned systems of heathen philosophy. And it is worthy of remark, amidst the variety of heterodox opinions which have infested the church upon almost every subject concerning which it was possible to dispute, that there is no controversy between serious and sober-minded Christians, concerning the true meaning of those precepts of holiness and honesty which pervade the New Testament, and the practical duties founded upon them. And those an-

tinomian enthusiasts who have from time to time arisen, both before and since the reformation, denying the obligations of the moral law, have never attempted to defend their anomalous impiety by the alleged insufficiency of scripture, or the obscurity of its precepts concerning those duties which they reject ; but by the misprision of particular passages, asserting the insufficiency of that formal righteousness which the Mosaic law required, they have taken away the moral law altogether, as no longer binding upon Christians, who are saved by grace, and not by works.

Nor is such an insane abuse of scripture any objection to its sufficiency as a code of morality, to such as are willing to understand it ; while to those who are determined to disregard its plain sense, and to wrest it to an agreement with their own preposterous conceits, it is evident that tradition would afford no security against error ; since it cannot be imagined possible that those who acknowledge the holy scripture to be the written word of God, and yet presume to handle it deceitfully, should

pay more respect to an unwritten comment upon it, even if they should not deny it to possess an equal degree of authority.

But though such arguments may be found among those which are advanced by Romanists, to prove the insufficiency of scripture without tradition, we are but combating shadows in attempting seriously to refute them. Nothing can prevent the misapprehensions of wilful blindness, or the aberrations of extravagant delusion. But the perfect agreement of all churches, and all sects of sincere men, concerning the great heads of moral duty, prove uncontestedly that there also, as in the case of faith, the scriptures alone are abundantly sufficient for the direction of believers, without the supplemental aid of tradition. The Christian life, indeed, is perfect only in proportion to its correspondence with the pattern exhibited in the New Testament; and he will be most like his Master, who most carefully conforms to his Master's precepts, as they are there delivered. And here we might quit the subject, if the necessity or utility of tradition, for any true and legiti-

mate purpose of religion, was the sole object of our inquiry. For unless it is wanted as a ground of faith, or a rule of life, there is no third office for which its service can be required.

But besides the necessity of tradition for the right understanding of scripture and for supplying its alleged deficiencies, for which our opponents contend, they further assert that its authority is clearly recognized in the scripture itself; as in the Old Testament where the Israelites are enjoined by ^b Moses to teach their sons and their sons' sons the mighty works of God wrought for their deliverance, that they might also learn to fear him, and not go astray after other gods; and as when in the New, St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians ^c to *keep the traditions which he had delivered to them*; and the Thessalonians ^d to *stand fast, and hold the traditions which they had been taught, whether, as he says, by word or our epistle*; besides some other equally irrelevant passages, which they wrest to the same purpose, and

^b Deut. iv. 10.

^c 1 Cor. xi. 2.

^d 2 Thess. ii. 15.

which in fact prove nothing in their favour; but when fairly examined go entirely against them, and are only forced into the argument to give it a colour of scriptural authority; of the whole support of which we at once deprive them, by observing that it is to written as well as unwritten tradition, that the apostle refers, and by substituting a definite for an indefinite term, in the ambiguity of which the whole secret of their strength lies.

The sense which in modern usage is affixed to the word *tradition* is that of unwritten history, or at least knowledge of some kind, orally transmitted, without the aid of letters; but the classical sense of the word, in which alone it appears to be used in the passages cited from the New Testament, and in every other, unless where it is mentioned with evident disapprobation, as invalidating the commands of God, is materially different, and comprehends instruction of every kind, however conveyed. Examples of this, both in Greek and Latin authors, must be familiar to all my hearers, and I should not have touched upon so tri-

vial a point of verbal criticism, if it were not for the purpose of fixing the true meaning of a word, which in the case before us is of the greatest importance; since it is from the indeterminate use of it that Romanists endeavour to draw arguments in support of their cause, which would be wholly inapplicable to it, if that uncertainty were removed. Nothing can be clearer, than that St. Paul, in speaking of traditions, which he exhorts his converts *to keep*, means nothing else than those instructions which he had before given them either verbally or in writing, and not occult principles of doctrine unfit for general communication, but such as we still read in his several epistles; nor can there be found in any part of the sacred volume the most distant allusion to any esoteric system of doctrines, which were neither to be committed to writing, nor freely imparted to the whole body of Christian believers, but retained for ever in the custody and at the discretion of the rulers of the church. In addition, however, to the texts adduced from St. Paul, Romanists claim support from the concluding

verse of St. John's Gospel, where the evangelist says, that many other things also were done by our Lord, which if they were separately related, *he supposes*, speaking with allowable hyperbole, *that not even the world itself would contain the books that should be written*. These things, therefore, omitted by the inspired writers, they would have us believe to have been preserved in their tradition, which must consequently be of high authority as a rule both of faith and practice. But they forget, that in the close of the preceding chapter, the same evangelist had thus observed upon the same subject ;
** But many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book : but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing ye might have life through his name ;* the unavoidable inference from which appears to be, that whatever was necessary to the faith of Christians has been preserved in the writings of the divinely inspired evangelists ; and

** John xx. 30, 31.*

that those particulars relating to the life and actions of our Saviour which have been omitted by them, to avoid too great prolixity, however it might gratify a pious curiosity to know them minutely, were not in the judgment of the Holy Spirit of sufficient importance to be particularly recounted; and if they have not been preserved in writing, because the grounds of faith were perfect without the knowledge of them, it is preposterous to suppose, that they have been handed down through the uncertain channel of oral tradition, and that the reception of them without any evidence of their authority can now at length be required of all Christians, to whom the knowledge of them was not judged necessary, till it had been so ruled by the modern church of Rome.

Tradition, however, in the sense which Romanists affix to it, is of such vital importance to their system of religion, that no point has been more laboured by them, than the maintenance of it in their acceptation of the term.

Assuming, without hesitation, that the

tradition spoken of in the apostolic writings means the oral transmission of recondite doctrines, they have recourse to such arguments, independent of the little support which they imagine that they can derive from scripture, to prove the reality and necessity of it, as men so expert in religious controversy would never condescend to employ, if they had any thing like direct testimony to bring forward. ‘Some of them seem to think that they have found a conclusive analogy between their tradition and the common or unwritten law of our own country, and that the one holds the same place in relation to the written word of God, as the other does to the written or statute law of the realm; forgetting that this unwritten law is but the natural sense of right and wrong which the Author of our being has impressed upon our minds, with its application to the unlimited variety of human actions, and the usages and decisions formed upon it, where the written law is silent; whereas their tradition, if it

^f Milner, Part I. Letter 10.

has any real existence, comes not, like the unwritten law, to which they compare it, from the light of nature, but altogether from revelation, and is in fact itself a subsidiary revelation, to supply the deficiencies of another previously derived from the same source, though conveyed through different channels.

^g Others have had recourse to the sentiments of ancient philosophers in approbation of this unwritten law, which from similar causes must obtain in all states, as affording, by analogy again, a support to their tradition; and not only are the learned sages of antiquity appealed to, but even the barbarous Druids, who communicated their most sacred mysteries by oral teaching only, and did not commit them to writing, are cited to the same effect by the ablest advocate of the papal cause. Yet, not relying altogether on vague analogies in support of their system, they tell us, that "^h within a " short period after the age of the apostles " the Christian religion did flourish and pre-

^g Bellarmine, *De Verbo Dei non Scripto.*

^h Milner from Irenæus, Letter 10.

“vail among nations which knew not even
“the use of letters,” and which must there-
fore have been converted by tradition only;
an argument which, however irrelevant to
that which they want to prove, is not with-
out its use; since it shews, contrary to their
intention, that tradition anciently meant,
as we have argued, in its proper sense, *in-
struction*, whether oral or written, while at
the same time it is evident that the former
was the only kind of instruction, which
men unacquainted with letters were capa-
ble of receiving. Under the same deno-
mination however, preaching, catechising,
and nearly every other kind of instruction
used at this day in our own church, except
the reading of the holy scripture and the
use of written forms, might with equal pro-
priety be comprehended: and it is well
known, that all true protestants, while they
allow no other authority than that of holy
scripture for the establishment of doctrines,
lay at least as much stress on the oral ex-
planation of doctrines so established as ever
the church of Rome has done; and without
doubt this legitimate kind of tradition is,

and ever will be, necessary to the increase and preservation of religion ; nor can the mere diffusion of the scriptures without it ever be expected by reasonable men to convert sinners to repentance and infidels to the faith. The aid of a Christian ministry to instruct, rebuke, exhort, must in all ages and in every state of civilization be indispensable to the maintenance of religion ; and when we call to mind that in the first ages, before the discovery of printing, the multiplication of books was slow, difficult, and expensive, and that in all probability there were not to be found within the compass of the Christian world as many copies of the Bible as are at this time contained in this seat of learning, it is evident that religious knowledge must have been propagated almost exclusively by oral tradition, in the sense which we have affixed to the word ; but this by no means sets tradition on the same level with holy scripture, nor supposes the existence of such a tradition as Romanists contend for, either concurrent with scripture, or independent of it. The true tradition of the primitive ages

was the unfolding of the truths of scripture by those who were ordained to the office of instructing the people in religion ; and the correctness and propriety of it was to be estimated by its congruity with scripture, which it was employed to elucidate and explain ; and, instead of judging scripture by oral tradition, the latter could only be used as an auxiliary to scripture, and altogether subordinate to it.

But such a tradition would not at all serve the purposes of the modern church of Rome ; and therefore, while they presume to assert that the holy scripture is not by itself a perfect rule of faith, but must be so taken in conjunction with tradition, they contend also that this tradition, without which, according to their principles, a true faith cannot be established, should not be made public, but reserved in the power of the church, that is, of the priesthood, for which they scruple not to assign this most extraordinary reason, “ⁱ lest it should be “ come as well known to heretics, Jews, and

ⁱ Bellarmine, *De Verbo Dei non Scripto.*

“ pagans, as to the highest orders among themselves ;” as if it was agreeable to the will of God, who calls all men to salvation through faith, that the ground of this indispensable faith should be inaccessible, except to a favoured few, and such others as they may think proper to admit to it.

Our blessed Lord’s commission to his apostles was, *to preach the gospel to every creature*, the reward and the penalty being annexed, *he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned*; and if the Romanists really hold that tradition is necessary to faith, as they must acknowledge that faith is necessary to salvation, they cannot but admit, that by keeping it secret their church is guilty of shutting the gates of eternal life against those who, by their common Lord, are called to enter in. But such an intention abstractedly we lay not to their charge. We doubt not that conscientious Romanists, as well as ourselves, are desirous that all men should be saved, and in them we impute it only to the blindness of irrational superstition, whatever our judgment may be concerning

those who are more profoundly instructed in their mysteries, that they exclude from the promises of the gospel such as disallow the sovereign power of their church, and doubt the authority of its head to lock and unlock the gates of mercy to whom he will. The truth is, that dominion over the minds of men is the great object of the church of Rome; and its rulers have found that the fiction of a divine tradition which they never divulge, but which they assert to be in their hands a certain guide to salvation, gives them an enormous influence over ordinary minds, and a firm hold even upon the strongest, into which the belief of it has been sedulously infused from infancy among the first principles of religion. Their tradition in fact serves them for a witness ever ready to attest whatever they want to prove, but not liable to a counter-examination, by which the real value of its testimony might be ascertained: it is heard only, but never seen; and by this dexterous management it has been made as efficacious an engine of spiritual power to papal Rome, as the Sibylline books were of state policy

to her pagan prototype : like them, it can be adapted to all exigencies, and silence every doubt ; so long at least as those who willingly acquiesce in palpable delusion shall by indolent credulity support its pretensions ; as soon as its foundations are examined, it must vanish into air.

If the reformation had established but this single point, " that all controversies of " faith and doctrine should be decided by " an appeal to scripture only," even that would have been an inestimable service to religion, the knowledge of which was before to be sought in the voluminous works of the fathers, and the decrees of councils, instead of the sacred book of God's word, and in a manner lay buried under the ever increasing piles of scholastic divinity.

And as it is said of Socrates that he called down philosophy from the clouds, and made it to dwell in the abodes of men, so did the leaders of the reformation, by turning away the study of religion from idle subtleties to the pious examination of holy scripture, familiarize men's minds with those immutable truths which are the foundation

of sincere faith, and prepare them for the spiritual worship of God which their religion requires, instead of the gaudy pomps and unedifying ceremonies in which a corrupt church had made so large a part of it to consist.

The benefits which protestants have derived from the free use of scripture, though, like the other good gifts of God, sometimes misapplied, and sometimes grievously abused, are great beyond all estimation, whether we regard their temporal or spiritual state.

Familiar access to the *fountain of living waters* has given a new impulse and a right direction to the mind, and has banished the long train of noxious delusions, by which religion was before disfigured; while those who have rejected the reformation are scarcely advanced beyond the point at which that event found them. And although the upbraiding example of protestants has in a manner compelled the rulers of the church of Rome apparently to relax something of their prohibitory zeal against scriptural knowledge, they have yet found

means to render it unproductive of its proper fruit, by forbidding those who are indulged with a permission to read the discourses of our Lord, and the doctrine of his inspired apostles, to understand what they read in any other sense than that which their church has set upon it ; and thus tradition still holds its preeminence in their practical application of it, as the paramount rule of faith and interpreter of scripture. And unless it shall please God, in his great mercy, to open their eyes, and to inspire them with a sincere desire to discern and embrace the truth, tradition must for ever retain its supremacy ; for their systematized corruptions of faith and doctrine and worship cannot be maintained without it.

In this respect there is a striking analogy between Roman Catholics and the sect which has assumed the appellation of Unitarians. The former, having adopted and engrafted upon Christianity a mass of incongruous superstitions, which, either expressly or by necessary inference, are condemned in scripture, and being determined not to abandon them, have called in the

assistance of tradition to defend their manifold adulterations of Christian truth ; while the Unitarians, rejecting the Christian faith, but insidiously retaining the Christian name, and being sensible that the scheme of religion which they have devised for themselves was utterly untenable on scriptural grounds, not many years since adopted the bold expedient of making a new translation of scripture, adapted to their own principles, upon a plan which sets at nought all the rules of criticism as well as the laws of common honesty ; by this expedient making it speak the language of their tradition, which, after the example of the Romanists, they have thus effectually placed above it.

I mean not, however, to insinuate against Romanists the guilt of equal impiety with men who have abjured the essentials of Christian faith, but to mark how a similar necessity has led in both cases, though in different ways, to a similar result. The Unitarian, with sacrilegious boldness, cuts down holy scripture to the measure of his own negative creed : the Romanist impairs its authority by teaching *for doctrines the com-*

mandments of men; and, like the Unitarian, he has no other alternative, but to forsake errors which can no longer be defended by sincere and enlightened men, and render his religion conformable to scripture, or, after the manner of his church, to weaken the force of scripture against it by attributing equal and practically greater authority to an unwritten revelation, of the authenticity of which no credible evidence nor probable argument can be produced. But tradition and the church of Rome are indissolubly linked together: tradition is the sole foundation for all her usurpations over the Christian world, the sole authority for all her innovations on primitive faith and worship. Even the supremacy of the pope, as derived by his asserted succession from St. Peter—a matter of small moment to protestants, but which, from the consequences which Romanists draw from it, ought to be as clear as any fact recorded in sacred history—depends wholly on tradition, mixed up too with the ^k grossest fables, and having

^k Vide Cave's History of Christ and his Apostles. Life of St. Peter.

such a weight of negative testimony from scripture against it, that, as a distinguished¹ prelate of our church justly argues, “we must either renounce the opinion,” (i. e. that St. Peter was the founder of the church of Rome,) “or let scripture give way to tradition.”

And yet on no better foundation than this pretended succession does the pope arrogate to himself, and his adherents ascribe to him, honours little less than divine, and powers which, unless gifted with infallibility—a prerogative indeed which they also claim for him, though not quite agreed among themselves on that point—no human being can be competent to exercise.

But again, according to the invariable pretension of the church of Rome, as it has been already observed, there is no salvation out of her pale; and this with true Romanists is not merely a speculative opinion, but a necessary article of faith. It ought, therefore, to be as capable of demonstration as any article of the Apostles’ Creed, since

¹ Marsh, Comparative View of Church of England and Church of Rome.

whoever for want of such demonstration refuses assent to it, must, upon their principles, be forthwith in a state of reprobation. And yet, if we search the scriptures throughout for any proof of it, we shall neither be able to discover it in any express declaration of our Lord himself, nor in any of the apostolical Epistles; whether addressed to particular churches or generally to the whole body of Christians; nor in any probable inference from any thing asserted by them, nor in any analogy to the known dispensations of God.

Instead of such proofs from scripture, we are referred to a few obscure and ambiguous texts, arbitrarily explained in a sense inconsistent with the general tenor of the sacred volume, and scarcely appearing to have any affinity to that which they are alleged to prove. And yet on these scanty and disputable grounds of scripture, so far as scripture is relied upon, the most important of their pretensions are founded; as, for instance, that St. Peter had not merely a precedence among the apostles by age or personal character, but that he was, in the

sense of real sovereignty, prince of the apostles; and without the smallest pretence of scriptural authority they assert that he founded the see of Rome, and was himself the first pope; and, what is still more extraordinary, that the powers which they attribute to St. Peter have descended with undiminished right to all his successors the popes, and are to continue with them to the end of time. That the support to be found in scripture, by any mode of interpretation, was too slender to sustain the hundredth part of the system established by the church of Rome, is self-evident: to supply the deficiency, therefore, recourse is again had to the never-failing help of tradition; and it is on that alone that the inadmissible pretensions of the sovereign pontiff are founded. In virtue of these pretensions, resting on tradition, many of the worst corruptions of the church of Rome, and against which the reformers had zealously contended, were embodied into articles of belief, and imposed on all its members as necessary to salvation by the reigning pope, at the conclusion of that council

which had been called to heal the wounds of religion, by redressing wrongs and removing the corruptions of the church. Many of these, which are referred to apostolical tradition, are of such a nature, that, as I observed in the former part of this Lecture, they would be alone sufficient to justify us in rejecting as altogether spurious, and unworthy of the Holy Spirit, any tradition to which such consequences could be attributed.

And as these articles still retain their place in the creed of the Romish church, and are declared to be necessary to salvation by her supreme authority, some of the most obnoxious of them shall be particularly examined in the ensuing Lectures, commencing with Transubstantiation ; and the result, I trust, will be an additional confirmation of that which it is my object to prove by unexceptionable evidence, “that “on religious grounds the reformation was “absolutely necessary ; and that if it had “not taken place at a former period, it “must have been effected now ;” and that separation from a church whose system of

religion is so manifestly corrupt, as that of the church of Rome is even at this day, is the indispensable duty of every man who in *singleness of heart* fears God, and hopes for salvation through the alone merits and mediation of his Redeemer. Amen.

LECTURE V.

JOHN iv. 24.

God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

IT is an old complaint with Roman Catholics, that protestants are ever fond of applying this text to them. But in this at least we do not act the part of enemies, and much is it to be wished, that, laying aside prejudice and party spirit, they would be persuaded to apply it to themselves ; that they would seriously consider the import of the words, the authority of the speaker, and the comprehensive application of the principle which is here laid down by him as an indefeasible characteristic of his religion ; and that they would remember how incumbent it is upon them and all Christians to try both their faith and worship by this rule of their divine Master, if they hope to render their service acceptable to God the

Father, who has given us these instructions by the ministry of his Son.

Apparently, however, forgetting the obligation of conforming to his precepts, it seems to have been the principal object of the church of Rome, in the multitude of showy ceremonies with which she has encumbered her ritual, to strike the senses and captivate the imagination, deviating in a remarkable manner from the chaste simplicity of the gospel, and, if I may be allowed the expression, materializing the Christian religion.

Whether the popish doctrine of transubstantiation, to the discussion of which I now proceed, in pursuance of the design announced at the close of my last Lecture upon the subject of tradition, may not be referable in its origin to this fondness for exhibiting spiritual truths under visible forms to the admiration of an ignorant people, may possibly be not altogether a useless subject of speculation. Certain, at least, it is, that there are in the institutions of that church other instances of a similar propensity to subject things of a purely

spiritual nature to a grossness of interpretation, by which, if their power of impressing the senses is increased, their effect on the mind is proportionably diminished.

But whatever the origin of the doctrine of transubstantiation may be, whether it proceeded at the first from ignorance, superstition, or interested craftiness, it is now, with all its monstrous consequences, elevated by the church of Rome to the highest rank among the articles of her faith; and although the genuine progeny of tradition, yet, in defending it against the objections of protestants, they would fain appear to place their whole reliance on the support of scripture.

According to their own principle, confirmed, as it has been, by successive popes and councils, guarded by the most terrible anathemas against all who may presume to impugn it, and the belief of it exacted of every member of that church at the peril of his soul, no man can be an honest Roman Catholic who entertains a doubt concerning it. If sense and reason should revolt against it, he must reject their remon-

strances as heretical, and assent to the infallible guide which assures him of its truth, in defiance of the testimony of both ; and when this absolute victory has been gained over a pious and diffident mind, no limits can be set to its credulity and submission.

The debasement of the understanding, thus effected, is the essential principle of the well-compacted superstition of the church of Rome, and the chief source of the amazing influence which her priesthood possess over the very highest, and, as we should suppose, the most enlightened of her laity.

When once, indeed, the mind of any sincere and unsuspecting man has been so scared out of its self-possession by spiritual terrors, or so bewildered by sophistry or overcome by plausible artifice, as to yield assent to propositions so monstrous as those which are asserted by Roman Catholic divines concerning the sacramental mysteries of the Lord's supper, what thenceforth can such an one refuse to admit for truth which the same spiritual guides, on whose authority he builds implicit faith, declare

to be both true and necessary for salvation?

But, if the power of the church of Rome seem to be consolidated by the absolute surrender of the understanding, which is necessary to the belief of this doctrine of transubstantiation, we shall find, on a nearer view, that it is a source of weakness also, and yet that her very existence depends upon maintaining it. Of this Romish writers are themselves most evidently sensible: they have therefore, as the occasion appeared to require, exhausted the force of declamation and the subtleties of elaborate sophistry in their endeavours to defend it; well knowing that not merely the maintenance of one single article of their creed, but the infallibility which they claim for their church, and its continued ascendancy over the minds of men, are staked upon the issue; that what they profess to consider as the most sacred part of their worship, and endeavour to screen from inspection, and to render most awful to timid credulity by the high-sounding phrases which they apply to it, must be abolished, and that a general reformation can no longer be delayed when

this outwork of their system can no longer be defended.

In the mean time it is a source of real weakness which cannot be disguised by any palliatives, unless to those who are wilfully blind; and whatever efforts may be employed to sustain the credit of so palpable a fiction, it must, in God's good time, fall before the united power of reason and scripture, and draw after it the dissolution of that fabric of error which is so intimately blended with it.

In men of corrupt lives and worldly minds, the eyes may be closed against the light, and the heart hardened against the impression of truth; but with such as are truly pious, and sincerely desirous both to know and to do the will of God, as we doubt not that many members of that church are, it would argue a distrust of the divine goodness, if we were to despair of the final prevalence of truth, notwithstanding the prejudices of education, and the obstacles arrayed against it by the policy of those who have an interest in opposing its progress.

Truth alone is eternal, delusion can have

but a limited duration. The sunshine of divine revelation must by degrees make its way into the darkest recesses ; and when men are required to believe incredible things, without any warrant from God's word, upon the testimony of pretended tradition, or the mere dictation of an uninspired mortal like themselves, reason will not for ever submit to authority so arrogantly abused ; but those who do not think it a sufficient reason of their faith, and *the hope that is in them*, to believe implicitly whatever "the church believes," will at length presume to ask the "Jewish *how*," as it is artfully stigmatized by one who well knew the danger of all inquiry to the system which he had devoted his utmost energies and unquestionably powerful talents to defend, in all its bearings, concerning the possibility of things which they are commanded to receive as truths necessary to salvation, with none of the visible characters of truth about them.

The controversies concerning transub-

^a Milner, End of Religious Controversy, part III.
Letter 38.

stantiation, which at earlier periods since the reformation were carried on between the advocates of the church of Rome and protestants, have filled volumes without producing any decisive result on the minds of those who had previously taken their ground on the opposite sides of the question : the one party being able to make no concession consistently with truth, and the other being bound to defend to the utmost whatever popes and councils had decreed, or to confess error and surrender the claim to infallibility, on which the whole of their spiritual power is built. And, so long as an appearance of argument can be maintained by quibbling upon words, they may persevere in their endeavours to perplex and confound what is naturally simple and perspicuous, and seem to the ignorant and credulous to say a great deal ; while in fact, if their intricacies are unravelled, and their lofty diction subjected to the test of reason and common sense, there will be nothing found in them but emptiness and fallacy, and their last stand must be made on tradition alone.

I should be guilty of great presumption if I were to suppose myself capable of adding any thing to the force of argument adduced by so many of the most eminent protestant divines, who have gone deeply into the question against this chimerical fiction.

My object in regard to this, as well as other glaring errors of the church of Rome, is, not to entangle myself in the labyrinths of false reasoning, which they have devised for the purpose of obscuring the truth, but merely to exhibit such reasons for rejecting them as are obvious to plain understandings, and at the same time of sufficient weight to determine all men, who believe that their salvation depends upon the sincerity of their faith, to separate themselves from her communion, and, by necessary consequence, to justify the reformation ; the end and object of which was to restore the purity of religion, and to remove the errors and corruptions by which both faith and worship were vitiated and disfigured.

In the interpretation of the words of our Lord, in the institution of the sacrament of

his body and blood at his last supper, the church of Rome contends for the literal sense, in support of her doctrine of transubstantiation, ours for the spiritual.

They assert that when he brake and gave the bread to his disciples, after that he had blessed it, saying these words, *Take, eat, this is my body*, the bread was actually converted into the true substance of his body. And in like manner when after supper he gave them the cup, saying, *Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*, that the wine was in like manner converted into the real blood of the divine Redeemer. This being assumed, and it being admitted by all Christians, that the holy rite then instituted by our Saviour was intended to be perpetual, they go on to assert, that as often as the consecration of the appointed elements of bread and wine is performed by the priest repeating the words of Christ, the same wonderful conversion equally takes place; and furthermore, as they have thought proper, apparently for the purpose of exalting the

dignity of the priesthood, to deny the cup to the laity, in order to justify this mutilation of the sacrament, they require it to be believed that the consecrated wafer alone, without the wine, which our Lord had declared to be the new testament in his blood, contains the “body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ;” that the Lamb of God is thus offered up to his heavenly Father day by day, a bloodless sacrifice for the living and the dead, being immolated by the word of the priest, which mystically separates the body from the blood, instead of the sword; and that being laid upon the altar under the form of bread, lifted up, and carried about in processions, he is to be worshipped under that appearance, with the same profound adoration as if the heavens were opened, and we saw him standing at the right hand of God: in a word, that the eternal Son of God, who is one with the Father and the Holy Ghost in all the attributes of the Godhead, is made visible to the eyes, handled by the hands, masticated and eaten by his worshippers, under the form of bread, as often as they

celebrate the eucharist according to the usage of the church of Rome.

There is a repulsive grossness in this doctrine, equally offensive to faith and reason. In a matter, however, of so sacred a nature, while we firmly protest against errors and corruptions, it is our duty to guard against all appearance of irreverence, and not to wound intentionally the right feelings of those whose piety entitles them to respect, while we lament their delusion and feel ourselves bound to refute their misconceptions.

In attempting, therefore, to state their case, I take nothing from the invectives of opponents, but have drawn exclusively from their own sources, in addition to prescribed ~~formularies~~, relying upon the authority of writers^b in the highest estimation among themselves; and without doubt, to Christians who have derived the knowledge of their religion from authentic sources, and have studied with competent abilities and impartial sincerity the holy scriptures, which

^b Bossuet, Milner, Butler, &c.

are alone *able to make us wise unto salvation*, a simple exposition must be the most effectual refutation of such palpable perversions of truth; in which, at the same time, the latent seeds of the most hurtful errors in faith, doctrine, and worship, are contained.

But, indeed, if we consider the kind of arguments with which Romanists endeavour to recommend the belief of transubstantiation, we shall be still more strongly impressed with the conviction of its being utterly untenable, and shall wonder how sober-minded men, unless in ages of profound ignorance, which is the natural parent of superstition, could ever be induced to receive it.

We are assured, by the most distinguished among the advocates of this doctrine, that the conversion of the consecrated elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, “by which he is received whole and entire at the same time, by so many people, in so many different places, is a

^c Bossuet, Var. of Prot. vol. i. p. 426.

“ miracle equal to the greatest and most
“ incomprehensible wrought by the power
“ of God ;” a position which we may admit
without danger to the cause of the refor-
mation, provided that the reality of it be first
proved.

But how is this to be done ? They tell us that this perpetual miracle, this greatest of all miracles, “^d by which all the other “ miracles which God has wrought for our “ salvation are confirmed,” is imperceptible to our senses and incomprehensible to our reason ; so that, according to their own showing, the greatness as well as the reality of this highly extolled miracle depends altogether upon the willing credulity of those to whom it is proposed, and is utterly incredible till men have consented to divest themselves of sense and reason, and to forego the use of those faculties which the Almighty has graciously bestowed upon us, for the very purpose of enabling us, as in all other things, so in religion, to discern truth from falsehood, and good from evil.

^d Bossuet, Var. of Prot. vol. i. p. 426.

All verbal subtleties in defence of such a doctrine are unworthy of serious notice ; and it is as vain to argue upon a subject in which the exercise of sense and reason is proscribed, as to dispute concerning the natures and institutions of another planet ; and we should be justified in refusing at once to believe what is imposed upon us in a manner so inconsistent with the whole course of providence and grace, if no other argument were brought against it.

But the defenders of transubstantiation are not content with placing their whole reliance on passive credulity.

They endeavour to add credibility to it, by the analogy which they pretend to have found between it and some of the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament ; as the change of Moses's rod into a serpent, and again into its primitive form of a rod, the substance still continuing the same ; the turning of water into blood among the plagues of Egypt, and again water into wine, as at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee ; and they contend that it is not more difficult for Omnipotence to

change the elements of bread and wine in the eucharist into the real body and blood of the Son of God, than to effect these and other miracles recorded in scripture, and still less than the creation of the world out of nothing; and therefore, that when our Lord declared at his last supper, that the bread which he brake and blessed, and gave to his disciples, was his body, and the wine his blood, to doubt that the effect followed his words, and still continues to follow each successive repetition of them by the priest in the consecration prayer, is to doubt his veracity or his power, on which they found a charge of heinous impiety against protestants. This, however, is but an artifice, and a very shallow one, to divert attention from the real point at issue between us and them.

We hold, as truly and unequivocally as they do, the divine omnipotence of the Redeemer, and his coequality with the Father and the Holy Ghost in all the attributes of the Deity.

But the question here is not concerning his omnipotence, what it can do, but what

in reality it does ; and nothing can well be imagined more monstrous in absurdity, or more audacious in impiety, than thus to contend that the promise of Christ has not been fulfilled, unless it has been fulfilled in its literal import, as they will have it, though reason and common sense and the context of scripture are unequivocally against them ; and it is truly amazing to hear them arguing, “^e that it was easier for “ the Son of God to force the laws of na-“ ture, in order to verify his words, than “ for us to accommodate our understand-“ ing to violent interpretations, which over-“ turn all the laws of speech ;” whereas these violent interpretations consist only in receiving in a figurative sense what they are determined to take in the literal, for the sake of establishing what they call the *real presence* of Christ under the species of bread and wine.

Very different were the miracles of our Lord upon earth from this pretended miracle of the popish eucharist. The evident

^e Bossuet, Exposition of Catholic Doctrine, p. 61.

design of his miracles was through the senses to impress the mind, and to induce those who were witnesses of them, to believe that he came from God, by the evidence which they afforded, that the power of God was among them ; and accordingly when he upbraided the cities of Judah, in which most of his mighty works had been done, for their unbelief^f, and again when to those who believed not his word, he appealed to the evidence of his works^g, in both cases we see equally the purpose of miracles ; that they were designed for a testimony to the beholders of the presence of divine power, in the person by whom they were wrought ; in order to which it was necessary that they should be perceptible to the outward senses, and not, like the pretended miracle of transubstantiation, indiscernible, even to those who most zealously profess to believe it. But in the particular cases which themselves allege, as in the turning of water into wine, and the creation of the world out of nothing, and the

^f John x. 37, 38.

^g John xiv. 11.

same might be said of every other scripture miracle, instead of helping their cause, the argument is decisively against them. For there the effect followed the word; *he spake and it was done*; and even unbelievers, who conspired the destruction of our Lord, could not deny that ^b *many miracles were done by him.*

The same power continued to the apostles contributed mightily to the growth of Christianity: ⁱ *They went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming their word with signs following;* which men saw, and therefore believed. But an imperceptible miracle, in things naturally amenable to our senses, is little less than a contradiction in terms; and if such had been the character of the scripture miracles, instead of convincing unbelievers, all reasonable men would have deemed such vain pretences a sufficient cause for discrediting any doctrine, which they might have been adduced to support.

But again, in addition to the forced and fanciful analogies which the defenders of

^h John xi. 47.

ⁱ Mark xvi. 20.

transubstantiation borrow from the Old and New Testament in support of their cause, an attempt is made to force into the same service, even philosophy and experience, unmanageable auxiliaries, it should seem, in a case where all inquiry is forbidden ; and the ^k possibility that our senses may sometimes be deceived, is cited as a reason for believing that they are deceived, or at least that their testimony is less to be credited, than the tradition of an infallible church ; which, however, without disparagement of its infallibility, has condemned the authors of some of the most splendid discoveries in science, and by which the most exalted views of the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Deity are exhibited to the pious mind, as guilty of pernicious errors.

In a word, nothing which could wear the appearance of an argument to confound the ignorant and perplex the superficial, has been omitted by popish divines, in their attempts to establish this delusion ; which, as themselves avow, and the reason of the

^k Milner, Part III. p. 59, 60.

thing proves, cannot be done away, without the dissolution of the whole fabric established upon it. For, on no other foundation than this asserted miracle of transubstantiation, the pretended sacrifice of the mass, the mutilation of the sacrament by taking away the cup from the laity, their doctrine of the real (or corporeal) presence, the homage of the most profound adoration paid to the consecrated wafer, as if really and substantially converted into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it is asserted in the supplementary papal creed, can possibly be justified, nor can it be surrendered to the force of reason and scripture, without tacitly admitting a grossness of faith and worship in that infallible church, to which paganism alone could furnish a parallel.

It is not therefore matter of surprise, when we see men of great learning and equal acuteness, and eminently wise in their generation, as many of its defenders have been, pertinaciously contending for it; while at the same time the futile weakness of all which they have been able to advance in its

support, compared with their general ability, and the strong interest by which their utmost efforts are called forth, is almost conclusive against the cause which they have laboured to maintain, and justifies the confident assurance, *that no weapon formed against the truth shall ultimately prevail.*

They have not however confined themselves to a system of self-defence, but have shewn an eagerness in attacking the tenets of their adversaries, which seems rather to imply a conscious inability to justify their own, than a real persuasion of their intrinsic soundness; so that in the most celebrated expositions of Roman Catholic doctrine on this head, nearly as much space is occupied by controversial matter, as that which is properly didactic and explanatory; and the differences of doctrine concerning the eucharist, which existed in the earlier days of the reformation between the different reformed churches, are cited with much affectation of triumph, as a proof that all were in error, and given up to a mind void of judgment, as soon as ever they had withdrawn from the church of Rome, and

presumed to study the scripture in preference to obeying her decrees. But though we admit that there were many shades of difference between the reformers in their doctrine of the sacrament, and serious errors in some of them, this neither militates against the reformation in general, nor canonizes the errors of the church of Rome. On the contrary, I would rather ascribe those original variations of the reformers, according to the principle with which I set out in the commencement of these Lectures, to the gracious purpose of divine Providence, to widen the basis and strengthen the foundations of the reformation, by awakening attention, and bringing into discussion almost every principle of Christian doctrine, among which that of the sacrament of the Lord's supper must by all parties be admitted to be one of the most important. With men who are not tied to a pretended infallibility, Christian charity must allow, that in things which are not precisely defined in scripture, nor simply discoverable by human reason, it is possible for individuals of competent knowledge and the greatest

piety to disagree in some slight modifications of opinion; and in regard to the subject of our present inquiry, it is certain that even in those doctrines of the early reformers concerning the sacrament, which we should least approve, there is nothing inconsistent with good intentions and sincere faith, even if we take the representations of their adversaries, who were anxious to exhibit them in the least favourable point of view. It is also certain, that the differences which did exist among them may be accounted for in ways which reflect no discredit upon any party.

Even those who were themselves the instruments for restoring to the Christian world the exercise of the understanding and liberty of conscience, which are essential to true religion, were not all at once emancipated from the thraldom of ages.

The work was necessarily progressive. Those corruptions of faith, doctrine, and worship, which are self-evident, and utterly indefensible, were forthwith condemned and renounced, as soon as the papal dominion was overthrown. The removal of such as

were less obvious was not undertaken, till increasing knowledge had more clearly demonstrated their erroneous character ; and in our own church, at least, no step was taken towards the correction of error, without that pious caution, which in departing from one extreme, guards against the danger of falling into another. All knowledge, except that which comes by inspiration, which we claim not for our reformers, must be partial and gradual ; and it is not a ground of censure, but a title to praise, that in the zeal of doing good, they did not forget the dictates of prudence and Christian humility.

With whom the doctrine of transubstantiation originated is a disputed point of no real moment. It is however certain that it was first imposed on the belief of Christians, in that dark period which followed the irruption of the barbarous nations and the downfall of the empire ; when learning was extinguished, and the states of modern Europe, as yet imperfectly formed out of the broken members of that mighty ruin, were sunk in ignorance and superstition ;

when the holy scriptures were almost unknown, and whatever the priesthood, in obedience to the mandate of the pope, the foundations of whose power were laid in those ages of darkness, declared to be an article of faith, was received without contradiction by a gross and unreasoning people.

And this tenet of transubstantiation, which added so largely to the influence of the sacerdotal order had been so diligently inculcated upon all minds, and was rendered so familiar by the daily services founded upon it, that many of those who at the dawn of the reformation were most clearly sensible of the corruptions of the church of Rome, in other important points of faith and worship, seem hardly at first to have suspected error in this, which is the fertile source of so many others ; and when, at length, by the more careful study of holy scripture, they came to be convinced that the papal doctrine was erroneous, they halted in their conclusions, and reluctantly abandoned the creed of their infancy, in proportion as diligent investigation and increasing knowledge convinced them, that

it was founded in delusion, or misconception of the truth. Such was especially the case of our own Cranmer, who, from having been a vehement assertor of transubstantiation, at length laid down his life in contending against it. And this, in the judgment of every candid mind, must be a convincing proof, that instead of bold and licentious innovators in religion, as the papal writers with one accord have represented them, the great leaders of the reformation were men of sincere piety and tender consciences, and proceeded in the work which they had undertaken, with that cautious moderation which its infinite importance demanded. There is, therefore, no cause for exultation to the adversaries of the reformation in the discrepancies of its early advocates, concerning the true doctrine of the eucharist; and least of all does it afford any justification for cherishing their palpable error, because some of those who rejected it still lingered in too near an approximation to it, or failed to express their own sentiments with sufficient clearness against it.

They may refute the consubstantiation of Luther with the same arguments as their own transubstantiation is refuted, without adding any strength to their own cause; nor yet will they be able to shew, erroneous as it is, that his doctrine has ever been applied to the same superstitious and truly idolatrous purposes as their own. They may invent or exaggerate differences between ¹Calvin and Zuingle and their respective followers, and hold up to derision the unsuccessful attempts which were made in the heat of theological controversy, and ineffectually repeated at later periods, to establish uniformity of doctrine concerning the sacrament among the reformed churches.

Protestants do not pretend to exemption from error, but only to sincerity in the search after truth, with a humble confidence that while they seek it in a congenial spirit, and diligently endeavour to apprehend it, by the use of such helps as the divine Mercy has provided for them, and

¹ Bossuet, Hist. Var. Part I. Book ix. Part II. Book xii.

above all, by the careful study of the written word of God, they will by his grace be preserved from any dangerous misapprehension of it. If they abandon those principles, and either in the vanity of human reason prefer novelty to truth, or resign themselves to the blind guidance of rash enthusiasm, or dogmatical bigotry, then indeed there will be reason to fear that God will abandon them. In the mean time, as the best security against error, let them *walk in the light as children of the light.*

Thus much it seems right to say of the reformation in general, respecting this subject of the doctrine of the eucharist; and that, not merely as an act of justice towards our fellow protestants of other communions, but because, as I have before remarked, it is the standing policy of the enemies of every reformed church, to misrepresent the principles, and exaggerate the real or imputed errors of all, and exhibit them as proofs that the reformation, to which they attribute such consequences, must have originated in the spirit of delusion; from whence they conclude, that the

only safe course for religious protestants to pursue, is to return to the obedience of that infallible church, which, by depriving her dutiful children of the dangerous liberty of judging and understanding for themselves concerning articles of faith and controverted points of doctrine, preserves them in happy ignorance and uninterrupted unanimity, and so insures their final salvation.

This, when stripped of all disguise, and exhibited in their true light, is the burden of all their arguments with protestants. Happily we *have not so learned Christ*, as to be in any danger of being imposed upon by them, nor of being induced by any persuasions to prefer darkness, with all its alleged advantages, before that light which is the peculiar attribute of ^m *the glorious gospel of Christ*. Of their boasted infallibility, and its necessary consequences, we may leave them the unmolested and unenvied possession.

Happily for ourselves, our doctrine of the

^m 2 Cor. iv. 4.

sacrament is so surely established on scripture and reason, that we can reflect upon it with the utmost satisfaction, and have much more reason to invite than to dread discussion, if it should please our adversaries of any denomination to descend into the field of argument against us. Religiously speaking, the church of England stands on a basis which cannot be shaken. Her doctrine is the doctrine of scripture, which is her only rule of faith and worship; is clear, consistent, spiritual, and full of consolation to such as *worship God in spirit and in truth.*

That of the church of Rome, on the contrary, involves the most glaring contradictions, which can be defended only by the most laboured and tortuous sophistry, and is the source of multiplied superstitions; and while it is founded upon an asserted fact, which is acknowledged to be totally imperceptible to sense and incomprehensible to reason, she requires all her members to receive it on pain of eternal damnation, as if it were as intuitively certain, or as capable of demonstration, as the being of

God, or any express article of the Christian faith.

Those, therefore, with whom the authority of an infallible church is paramount to all objections, who can believe with her, and in deference to her demands, in opposition to sense and reason, that in the consecrated wafer, and every the smallest particle of it, the body, blood, soul, and divinity of the eternal only-begotten Son of God are fully contained, and ought to be worshipped with the highest degree of divine adoration, those who believe these things do rightly in adhering to her communion, and may be respected for their well-meaning piety, as well as commiserated for their doating superstition.

But if there be any who do not in heart and soul assent to this doctrine, nor believe that it is either taught in scripture or essentially true, nor that divine honour may be lawfully paid by a Christian to the consecrated elements in the eucharist and the pretended sacrifice of the mass, and yet continue professed members of a church which exacts such pledges of allegiance

from all her people, and either by instruction or example lead others to believe what themselves do not believe, what can we say, but that it is high time to lay aside all dissimulation, and judge themselves, that they be not judged of the Lordⁿ!

Whatever their motives may be for dealing with insincerity in the sight of Him *who seeth the secrets of the heart*, whether a regard to worldly honour or distinction, the false pride of adhering to tenets once embraced, and defending ancient errors rather than acknowledge and renounce them, or an undue deference to the wishes and opinions of others, their conduct, as men pretending to religion, is equally without excuse. However they may disguise it to themselves, the world has the first place in their affections, and they can never be accounted true disciples of that divine Mas-

" Bossuet artfully remarks, *Variations of Protestants*, Vol. I. Book vi. p. 259. "There is no way of avoiding "the sacrifice, adoration, and transubstantiation, without "denying in the bread this real presence of Jesus Christ." We may as truly add, There is no way of justifying them, without proving it.

ter, who ^o came into the world, that he might bear witness to the truth; nor can any be farther from being governed by that Spirit which was in him, than those who perversely oppose or unfaithfully handle it.

These observations are not advanced in a spirit of uncharitableness; we are not animated by ill will to the persons of those whose errors we condemn and deplore; nor do we take merit to ourselves, because by the singular and inscrutable mercy of God we have been delivered from that bondage of spiritual darkness to which so many others are still left enthralled.

Well, therefore, does it become us to follow the advice of the apostle to the ^p Romans, in circumstances somewhat analogous to our own, not to be *high-minded, but fear*, and use with moderation ^q *the liberty where-with Christ has made us free*. To cherish such a temper is at all times our wisdom and our duty, and will best preserve us from many occasions of falling. But humility, charity, and godly fear are perfectly

^o John xviii. 37.

^p Rom. xi. 20.

^q Gal. v. 1.

compatible with a well-governed zeal for the truth. Otherwise they would be in direct opposition to the highest and most indispensable obligations of every sincere Christian, but more especially of a Christian minister.

For if, as our Lord teaches, it *is eternal life to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent*, it must be an imperative duty with them, above all men, never to compromise with error, nor to forbear to refute, when occasion is afforded them, whatever may tend to impair that knowledge, or render it of none effect. And if offence be taken where none is intended, we must plead for ourselves to those who suffer our expostulation so impatiently, in the words of St. Paul to the Galatians, *s. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?* the attainment of which, as it ought to be the object of all our inquiries, so if it was pursued by all Christians in singleness of heart, then indeed we might hope to see an end to religious ani-

^r John xvii. 3.

^s Gal. iv. 16.

mosities, if not a total cessation of those extreme controversies, by which the household of faith is divided against itself.

By some persons the popish doctrine of transubstantiation has been considered as a mere speculative error, and by others as differing more in form than reality from the doctrine of our own church. But, I trust, it is sufficiently evident, that it must be a very inaccurate and superficial view of the subject which could lead any sincere man to either of these conclusions.

Whoever will be persuaded to bestow upon the study of it that careful attention which its importance demands, will be convinced that both are equally unfounded.

He will unavoidably perceive, that the Romish doctrine is not simply liable to the imputation of speculative error, but that it tends of necessity to great practical abuses and corruptions of religion; while the doctrine of our church, on the contrary, is liable to no such objections; but is altogether holy and spiritual, equally congenial to true piety, and remote from superstition.

In a word, the difference between us

on this head, is in effect the same which pervades the respective systems of both churches in all their parts. The one holds to ^t *the letter which killeth*, the other to *the spirit which giveth life*. The one exhibits a shew of piety in rites and ceremonies, and external exercises of devotion; the other, renouncing as utterly worthless and delusive all formal acts of religion without faith and holiness, exhorts all her members to ^u *sanctify the Lord God in their hearts*; and while they rely only on the merits and intercession of their Redeemer for deliverance from sin and acceptance at the throne of grace, to ^x *present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is their reasonable service*.

^t 2 Cor. iii. 6.

^u 1 Peter iii. 15.

^x Rom. xii. 1.

LECTURE VI.

1 TIMOTHY ii. 5.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

WHEN once the genuine principles of religion have been vitiated or forsaken, and human presumption has ceased to respect the landmarks and fences which the divine Wisdom has appointed, to repress vain imaginations, and direct the researches of sober piety striving to attain the knowledge of the truth, the further it proceeds the more widely it digresses from the right way; reason is bewildered, and one error follows as a corollary to another.

It ought not, therefore, to surprise us, when we see those who, without the sanction of reason or scripture, in the true spirit of heretical perverseness, have proclaimed and strenuously contended for the doctrine of transubstantiation, with its consequent and inseparable corruptions of faith

and worship, as true and essential articles of the Christian religion, carried away to still greater lengths of grossness and infatuation.

The intention which I professed in the opening of these Lectures, was not to exhibit a detailed account of all the grave errors of the church of Rome, a work not to be attempted within so narrow a compass, but to notice more particularly some of those which by their greater enormity rendered reformation on religious grounds absolutely necessary; and because reformation was peremptorily denied by the rulers of that church, made it the duty of all sincere Christians who were sensible of her corruptions to withdraw from her communion, and of which, as the efficient and justifying causes of that consummation, the force and reason remain undiminished to the present time.

Some, therefore, of very serious import, and which added not a little to the necessity of the reformation, but which calmly reviewed, should rather be considered as accessory, than as substantive causes of that

event, (and which, if the council of Trent had not thought proper to confirm and perpetuate them by her decrees, might have been so modified as to render them innoxious, or explained away, or tacitly abandoned,) I must leave to be briefly touched upon hereafter, and for the present pass on to the examination of those more glaring corruptions, by which the worship of the church of Rome has been so nearly assimilated to paganism, and which, if the declaration of the apostle in the text be true, or the warning which he elsewhere gives, that **there is no agreement between the temple of God and idols*, or that of the prophet, ^b *that the Lord will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images*, must be utterly rejected without compromise by every sincere and faithful Christian.

Not that those other causes of disagreement and separation, to which I have at this time made but a cursory allusion, and must eventually dismiss with inadequate brevity, are either obsolete or of light im-

^a 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^b Isaiah xlvi. 8.

portance, seeing that they are still integral parts of the Romish system, and pregnant with hurtful superstition; and are only less worthy of distinct animadversion than the invocation of saints and veneration of images, because they are less forced upon our notice, than these characteristic deformities of the church of Rome, which hold so conspicuous a place in her authorized forms of worship, and are at once so degrading to Christianity, and so peculiarly offensive to those who draw their principles of religion from holy scripture, and not from apocryphal tradition.

The first of these, the invocation of saints, shall form the main argument of my present Discourse.

If all other evidences were wanting to prove that the church of Rome is given up to a *strong delusion*, and is no longer a true church of Christ, notwithstanding her lofty pretensions and imposing display of exterior sanctity, practices like these, obstinately retained and artfully defended, in

◦ 2 Thess. ii. 11.

direct and manifest contradiction to all that we know of the attributes of God by reason or revelation, would fully justify us in pronouncing such a judgment concerning her. Having scarcely a shadow of scriptural authority for either of these gross degradations of Christian worship, it is boldly asserted by that church, that they are both founded upon apostolical tradition; which, as I have before observed concerning the uses in general to which it is applied, would be alone sufficient to destroy the credit of tradition, and to justify our church in rejecting it altogether as a rule of faith and worship, and admitting its authority in any sense, or for any purpose, under this restriction only, “that nothing be ordained “against God’s word.” Nor could a more decisive proof be adduced of the pernicious consequences of placing tradition on a level with scripture, than that which the case before us exhibits, of attempting to establish by tradition principles of faith and worship, which we may without hesitation pronounce to be utterly incompatible with the elementary truths of revealed religion,

and so unworthy of the infinite, incomprehensible Deity, that even the reason of an enlightened heathen would revolt at them.

And if it were possible, as Romanists pretend, to trace up to the earliest ages of the church, either doctrines or institutions at variance with that immutable rule, which the wisdom of God has provided in his written word for the perpetual security and criterion of our faith, it would not at all benefit the cause of those who contend for them. It might prove the early origin of corruption, but could not justify it. If but the last link in the chain were wanting, if that, for which apostolical authority is claimed, cannot be traced up to the apostles themselves, of which their inspired writings, if at least it be a point of doctrine, are now the only admissible testimony, the whole must fall to the ground, and is no more worthy of regard, than if it were the invention of yesterday; and when Romanists boast of the superior antiquity of their form of faith and worship, it is proper to remember, that nothing is really ancient in religion, which is posterior to

the age in which Christianity in its unadulterated truth and purity was first preached upon earth by our Lord and his apostles; and that whatever of later origin has been added to it, at however remote a period from our own times, is truly and properly a religious novelty. Whatever authority may be claimed for the fathers by their fondest admirers, they will not certainly attribute inspiration to them; and if either their glosses on scripture, or their historical testimony, or recorded opinions, or unguarded phraseology can be adduced in support of manifest depravations of authentic Christianity, it may indeed weaken their own credit for judgment or fidelity, but can never shake that of the apostles and evangelists, to whom the final appeal must be made for terminating all controversies of faith and doctrine among Christians.

Now it is declared by the modern church of Rome to be an article of the true catholic faith, out of which no man can be saved, “^dthat the saints reigning together with

^d Creed of Pope Pius, Art. 8.

“ Christ are to be venerated and invoked, “ and that they offer prayers to God for us, “ and that their relics are to be venerated;” and no one can be received as a convert into her communion, or honestly and with a good conscience continue a member of it, who does not, without subterfuge or mental reservation, assent to every proposition expressed or implied in this article.

Arguing with men who were permitted to see the truth, and who were not bound to the defence of corruptions once sanctioned in their church, by the necessity of preserving unbroken the spell of her pretended infallibility, it would be sufficient for the refutation of so gross a mixture of presumptuous error and debasing superstition, as are here engrafted on the faith necessary to salvation, to exhort them to search the scriptures whether these things are so, or to consult the reason which God has given them for their guidance, wheresoever he has not interposed by a special revelation of his will.

But, as it has been before observed, reason in its most pious exercise is scarcely al-

lowed a place by Romanists in controversies of religion.

It is the prerogative of the church, or of those who speak in her name, to judge and determine in all such cases, and the duty of her members, unless they are prepared to incur the stigma and penalties of heresy, to bow to her authority, and abide by her decision; and in the present instance, scripture, in every part it, from Genesis to Revelations, is both in letter and spirit so decidedly against them, that ultimately they have no resource left, but to take refuge in church authority and tradition ; which, as I have observed in a former Lecture, is their grand expedient to escape from every difficulty and to cloke every corruption. A very faint attempt indeed is made to derive an apparent sanction from scripture for the invocation of saints, or rather, by the artful misapplication of irrelevant passages, to render the practice less offensive to such of their own communion as might possibly think that in a case of so great moment the Bible-book, as they contemptuously term it, ought not to be altogether

superseded by the authority of tradition, or the mandates of popes and decrees of councils. But the attempt is so faint, the arguments so feeble and unnatural, that seriously to refute them would be to give them an importance which they do not deserve: a very slight notice of some of them in their proper place will be sufficient for every useful purpose. As to protestants, therefore, who admit no rule of faith, nor testimony in support of any doctrine as conclusive, but that of holy writ alone; nor allow to any uninspired mortal the right of changing, suppressing, or adding to *the faith once delivered to the saints*, it is superfluous to argue against that which is unsupported and unsanctioned by the only authority to which they believe it consistent with the first principles of their religion to defer. The want of such sanction and support is with them the most decisive refutation of any thing which is pronounced by mere human authority to be entitled to universal belief or observance; and upon this ground alone, if other reasons were wanting, we should be justified in rejecting

the fellowship of a church, which attempts to impose upon all Christians as an article of faith necessary to salvation, that which, by her own shewing, is incapable of being proved true from scripture; and much more, when it is such in its nature, that we can prove it false beyond the power of contradiction, if the dispute is to be terminated by the letter or spirit of scripture.

But the necessity of withdrawing from a church which has introduced and pertinaciously retains such a depravation of true religion as that of addressing invocations and prayers to created beings, and still requires all her members to adopt the practice in obedience to her decrees, as the church of Rome has done, is rendered yet more apparent in her case by the arguments employed to vindicate and recommend it.—The church of Rome holds as expressly, and, we doubt not, as sincerely as ourselves, the first great principle of all true religion, the unity of God, and the fundamental articles of the Christian faith; and we are not called upon to argue these points against her, for the refutation of her

doctrines upon the subject in question, or the justification of our own church in her total condemnation of them; but to shew the inconsistency of holding these immutable truths, and yet, as we may boldly affirm, in plain disregard of their necessary consequences, and in direct opposition to scripture and reason, on the strength of a pretended apostolical tradition, unattested, as we have already seen by any credible evidence, and intrinsically unworthy of the origin to which they ascribe it, imparting to inferior natures a portion of that honour which is due to God alone; of which presumptuous impiety we hold that church to be undoubtedly guilty.

St. Paul imputes it to the ancient heathen, that *"when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, that they became vain in their imaginations, that professing themselves wise, they became fools;"* and to the delusive vanity of being wise above those simple and self-evident truths which are attainable by reason, concerning the being and attributes of God, from the survey of

^e Rom. i. 21, 22.

his visible works, they fell into idolatry and its inseparable consequences of mental blindness and moral corruption; so that while we find in heathen writers the most just and beautiful sentiments concerning the Deity, to whom they ascribe holiness, justice, benevolence, and other truly divine perfections, their systems of religion were utterly unworthy of God, and incompatible with their creed. They worshipped him not as a Being invested with such attributes; as the apostle speaks, *they glorified him not as God*. They neither remembered in their practice the holiness and spirituality of his nature, nor honoured him with services which such a Being might vouchsafe to accept from his rational creatures, but invented ceremonies and forms of adoration full of licentiousness and impurity; and bestowing divine honours upon a vast multitude of inferior beings, whom they associated with the supreme God in the government of the world, they at length totally lost sight of those cardinal truths of natural religion, which, if duly observed, would have saved them from sinking into

such depths of grossness and debasement. Forsaking the real though imperfect light of nature, and giving themselves up to a vain imagination, they were carried away with infinite delusions, and ^f *their foolish heart was darkened.*

I would not be thought to insinuate in the remotest sense, that the church of Rome at this day stands in the same predicament as the heathen world before the coming of Christ. Nor is it possible that any sect of Christians, while they continue to hold the fundamental articles of the faith once revealed to the universal church, which that of Rome assuredly does, though obscured and grievously debased by spurious additions, should relapse into all the darkness and corruption of paganism. Between unenlightened heathens, and Christians in the most unfavourable state compatible with their religion, there will still be a wide difference: but it is certain that those of Rome, while they claim to be alone entitled to the true name of Christians, ^g *have*, like

^f Rom. i. 21.

^g Eccl. vii. 29.

the heathen, *sought out many inventions*, whereby the salutary truths which they maintain are to a great degree rendered ineffectual ; and among the foremost of these must be placed the veneration and invocation of saints and angels, which cannot be practised without infringing upon the attributes of God.

The Psalmist beautifully suggests the grounds of divine adoration, in one of his most admirable addresses to the Deity ;
^b *Thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.*

On this principle alone it is that we pray to God with full confidence, because we certainly believe him to be all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good ; and by virtue of these incommunicable attributes that he knows our wants, and is ever ready to grant what we ask aright, with a perfect resignation of our will to his, “ⁱ for the relief of “our necessities, and the setting forth of “his glory.” The very act of praying implies this belief concerning the Deity whom

^b Psalm lxv. 2.

ⁱ Collect after communion.

we worship; and without such a persuasion, to pray at all, to supplicate the compassion, or invoke the help of a being, whom we did not believe conscious of our addresses, or able to grant our petitions, would be an act of the most senseless absurdity.

The Roman Catholics, therefore, who have made it an integral part of their religion to address themselves in prayer to departed saints, that is, to the spirits of men and women, whose hearts, while they lived, were known to God alone, and who are yet waiting in another state the final award of the great day, must be guilty of the fearful presumption of ascribing to them some portion at least of the glorious perfections of the Deity.

That they are sensible of the difficulty of defending such a practice, and satisfying the scruples of the more enlightened among themselves, is sufficiently evident from the fanciful and indefinite explanations by which they endeavour to escape from it.

One of their most distinguished apologists leaves it undetermined, after asserting unequivocally, in his celebrated Exposition

of the Doctrines of the Church of Rome, "that prayers addressed to the saints are exceedingly profitable to such as make use of them," through what channel this great benefit is to be obtained.

Reason, however, would seem to require, that, if the custom^k of addressing prayers to the saints be indeed so exceedingly profitable, the manner and principle of it should not be left in vague uncertainty by the most learned expositors of the Romish tenets, while at the same time they feel themselves qualified to speak so expressly of the great advantages attending it; and yet in that most celebrated treatise to which I have just referred, and to the orthodoxy of which every member of that church zealously assents, we find nothing positively asserted; but instead of a precise explanation, where, if the doctrine be but true, it does not appear to exceed the measure of human comprehension, or to involve any inscrutable mystery, we are amused only with visionary speculations, "^lwhether, for instance, the

^k Bossuet, Expos. of Cath. Doct. p. 27.

^l Ibid.

“ saints comprehend us by the intercourse
“ or ministry of angels, who, being esta-
“ blished *ministering spirits* by the order of
“ God in the work of our salvation, know,
“ as the scripture testifies, what passes here,
“ amongst us; or whether God himself dis-
“ covers our desires to them by a particular
“ revelation; or whether, in short, he dis-
“ closes the secret to them in his infinite
“ essence, where all truth whatever is com-
“ prehended.”

Here, if there is nothing satisfactory to the rigid inquirer after truth, there is at least sufficient latitude of explanation in an article of faith declared necessary to salvation, to render it palatable through some mental fiction to those who might not otherwise be easily reconciled to the admission of it. But whether any of his ingenious hypotheses afforded satisfaction to their eminently acute author, while he laboured to remove the scruples of others less clear-sighted than himself, we may be permitted to doubt.

Another very recent defender of the church of Rome, inferior in ability to few,

and in zeal to none, who have advocated the same cause before him, has laboured this point with infinite art, but without shedding any new light upon it^m.

His object, indeed, has been too evidently to elude unanswerable objections to the whole system of saint-worship, and to obscure what he professes to illustrate; and all that he attempts to say, bearing upon the real question, amounts but to this; that although they grant that Christ alone is the Mediator of salvation, it is not to be argued from thence that there is no other mediator of intercession; (upon which I would remark by the way, that it clearly amounts to an unwilling acknowledgment that the pretended mediation of the saints is incompatible with the sole mediation of Christ asserted in the text;) and because St. Paul requested the prayers of the churches in his labours and trials, and Job those of his living friends in his affliction, he adduces this as a justification of the Romish practice of praying to departed saints to inter-

^m Milner, Part III. p. 18. End of Religious Controversy, Letter 33.

cede with God for them by prayers on their behalf.

It is not worth while to analyze the unintelligible phrase of *a Mediator of intercession* distinct from the *Mediator of salvation*, an office wholly unknown to holy scripture, and therefore affording an additional illustration of the value of tradition, by the aid of which so important a discovery has been made; nor to point out the difference between asking the prayers of our brethren here on earth^m, for whom it is a part of our commanded duty to perform the same office of spiritual charity, and invoking the spirits of the dead, to render us that help which the scripture teaches us to expect from the Son of God alone, who is also the Son of man, and the only appointed Mediator between God and man; "ⁿ *who having entered by his own blood into the holy places not made with hands, ever liveth to make intercession* for those who put their whole trust in him. To him we apply in every time of need, in full confidence of his

^m. 1 Tim. ii. 1.

ⁿ Heb. ix. 24, &c.

favourable kindness towards us, because he died once to deliver us from our sins; and of his power to save us, because he is one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, having ^oall power both in heaven and in earth, being ^pover all, God blessed for ever.

This is a substantial faith, which may strengthen the weak, encourage the humble, and raise up the fallen; and when the word of God assures us, that we have him for our Advocate with the Father who is himself the propitiation for our sins, how great must be the blindness, how excessive the infatuation of those, who, doubting the sufficiency of such a mediation, have recourse to other mediators of whose power to help them they know nothing; and of whose consciousness to the prayers addressed to them not even the wisest among the vindicators of such a practice can give a rational and consistent explanation.

Such, however, are the consequences of indulging a vain imagination, and suffering human authority to dictate concerning

^o Matth. xxviii. 18.

^p Rom. ix. 5.

things which can be known only by the revelation of God. But if argument fail, our last quoted author has recourse to persuasion, to induce us to adopt the practice of praying to saints and angels : “ How sublime and consoling,” he exclaims, “ how animating is the practice of true catholics, compared with the opinions of protestants ! We hold daily and hourly converse, to our unspeakable comfort and advantage, with the angelic choirs, with the venerable patriarchs and prophets of ancient times, with the heroes of Christianity, the blessed apostles and martyrs, and with the bright ornaments of it in later ages, the Bernards, the Xaverii, the Teresas, and the Sales’s. They are all members of the catholic church.” And, proceeding in his address to his imaginary correspondent, he adds, “ Why should not you partake of this advantage ? Your soul, you complain, (dear sir,) is in trouble ; you lament that your prayers to God are not heard : continue to pray to him with all the fervour of your soul ; but why not en-gage his friends and courtiers to add the

“ weight of their prayers to your own ^q? ” With more to the same effect. After perusing this passage, one can hardly forbear exclaiming, What a heaven must the author of this rhapsody have contemplated ! And yet, as I have before observed, these are not the words of an unknown fanatic in a distant age, but of ^rone recently removed from these sublunary abodes, and long reckoned among the brightest luminaries and firmest pillars of modern popery in this country ; and, if true wisdom and excessive superstition could coalesce in one person, his talents and acquirements would give deserved weight to his opinion. And yet how strange to the ears of Christians, who know the scriptures, must such delirious extravagances sound ! and to what depths of anile imbecility must not those be sunk, how wise soever in their own conceits, who could imagine or admit such fictions for truth ? The holy scriptures indeed encourage us to look beyond this earthly scene,

^q Milner, Part III. p. 18. End of Religious Controversy, Letter 33.

^r Vicar apostolic and bishop of Castabala.

and to elevate our thoughts to those pleasures which are *at God's right hand for evermore*, and in our passage through this vale of mortality to endeavour to fit ourselves for the society of angels and *the spirits of just men made perfect*. To attain to this is the final aim and hope of all true Christians; but in vain shall we look through the sacred volume for saints reigning with Christ, while the church is still militant upon earth, and exercising power and influence as the friends and courtiers of the Almighty! Such a figment of visionary superstition is monstrous to reason, and shocking to Christian piety; nor will a parallel to it be any where found, except in the mythology of the heathen, from whence it was undoubtedly borrowed.

To be given up to such delusions is the fearful penalty of following human traditions falsely asserted to be divine, and refusing to submit to the sole authority of the written word of God; which, to those who piously study and dutifully obey it, is a sure and sufficient guide to all that we are required to know concerning the will

and dispensations of God, and all, probably, that in our present state we are capable of comprehending concerning those secret things of eternity, which the divine Wisdom has not more fully revealed. And if the most profound and learned among the advocates of such a system of religion, if the most admired luminaries of the papal church, have wandered into such mazes of dangerous error, it is nothing wonderful that their less enlightened followers should be immersed in yet grosser superstitions ; a fact too notorious to be here insisted on, though not without its weight in estimating the merits of the system itself, to which such consequences invariably adhere.

But it is not true, as they pretend, that they pray to saints only as mediators, though even that is a perilous and sinful presumption. They make also direct addresses to them, as endued with power to grant their requests ; and, though they generally in argument refuse to acknowledge this, their authorized books of devotion incontestably prove it, and that consequences as injurious to morality as religion have flowed from it.

But far beyond the pernicious delusion of teaching men to rely upon the efficacy of the prayers of the saints for securing the favour of God, is the impious fiction concerning the merits of their works and sufferings, as contributing, jointly with those of the divine Redeemer, to the remission of the sins of men; which is in direct opposition to the doctrine of scripture.

For the scripture, far from teaching that any man's righteousness is more than sufficient for his own justification, inculcates no truth more emphatically than this, that the best of men are still imperfect, and *concluded under sin, that in the sight of God no man living shall be justified*, and that we are delivered from eternal death only through the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and through faith in his blood.

This is the uniform tenor of the New Testament, not the doctrine of any particular section of it, but the great truth which pervades the whole in characters not to be mistaken; so that we are justified in asserting that he cannot be a true Christian who does not with his whole heart embrace it;

and yet the church of Rome fears not to delude her followers with doctrines utterly at variance with it, concerning the supererogatory virtues of the saints and the treasures of their merits, which she has in her keeping, to dispense, according to her good pleasure, to such of her children as she deems worthy of so precious a favour; and not only to the sufferings of real martyrs, but even to the self-inflicted tortures of monastic recluses and phrensiad fanatics is this efficacy ascribed; and while holy scripture teaches that the best of men are saved only through the merits and intercession of Christ, that church has appointed by her own authority, upon the foundation of a vain tradition, other mediators between God and man, to whom she directs her members to make their humble addresses, and to depend upon their good offices.

This is more particularly true concerning the prayers addressed to the blessed Virgin, in whose honour the powers of language have been exhausted, to furnish appellations and epithets, some of which are offensive to protestant ears from their extravagant ab-

surdity, and some it would be a breach of Christian piety to utter. But not only to her who enjoyed the supreme honour of being mother to the Son of God, and whom, according to her own prophecy, *'all generations shall call Blessed;* nor to the inspired apostles, by whom the gospel was first preached to all nations, and by whose writings the universal church is still edified and enlightened, are these honours paid, and these powers ascribed; but to a multitude of others, whose names are almost unknown to the world, whose very existence is in some instances doubtful, and whose piety, recorded in fabulous legends, was, if sincere, of that fanatical kind, which, if they had been protestants, would have been attributed by those who now venerate them above the lot of mortality, to disordered intellects or spiritual delusion.

Yet to such persons, pronounced by the Roman pontiffs to be saints, honours all but divine are paid, litanies addressed, pilgrimages performed, and miracles ascribed in such abundance, that in the dark ages

^s Luke i. 48.

in which they flourished the course of nature would seem to have been suspended, for the exhibition of their prodigious endowments; and that, for the most part, to establish no important truth of religion, but simply to signalize the sanctity of the individual, or the excellence of some religious order, or to confirm some artful pretension of the church of Rome.

And although the claims to ^tsaintship are said to be now liable to a severer scrutiny, and works which in ignorant ages would have excited astonishment would now only provoke derision; yet the power of canonizing saints to whom prayers are to be offered, and by whose prayers in return the living are to be benefited, is still claimed and exercised by the popes, and the power of working miracles, which is one of the requisite marks of real saintship, is unhesitatingly asserted to be a perpetual and peculiar privilege of the church of Rome by all her advocates; and the ^uexperiments of

^t Vide Introductory Discourse to Butler's Lives of Saints.

^u Prince Hohenlohe, &c.

that kind which in our times have been attempted upon superstitious credulity, and are yet fresh in the memory of us all, sufficiently prove that deceivers will never be wanting, while there are those who are willing to be deceived.

Concerning the general character of those mortals, who by the papal fiat are elevated before the last judgment into courtiers of heaven, and, as they express it, mediators of intercession between God and man, a just estimate may be formed by referring to an authority, which on such a point is above all exception. The latest specimen of the Lives of the Saints, not long since edited by a living layman of that church, a zealous and distinguished partisan of all her spiritual claims and pretensions, and a partial admirer of the original author of that notable compilation, though it is acknowledged that much has been retrenched, as less fit for the public eye in these days, exhibits, blended at the same time with much appearance of misapplied piety, such a picture of miserable credulity both in the editor, who has in these days reproduced

such a work, and the community to which such monuments of superstition can still be acceptable, as cannot but excite the astonishment of Christians, who have been accustomed to the reading of holy scripture, and the study of its history and doctrines, for the edification of their faith.

It is unnecessary to adduce particular instances in support of this position. Our objections to the worship of created beings stand on much broader ground than the unworthiness of particular individuals, to whom the honours of saintship may have been awarded; and if it could be shewn that, instead of the superstitious aberrations which their historians attribute to them, these *semidei* of popery were endowed with the most exalted spiritual graces and virtues of which human nature in its most improved state is capable, they would be nothing more entitled to the homage of veneration and invocation, how much soever we might reverence their memory and desire to imitate their example.

But far beyond the absurdity of praying to saints is that of venerating their relicks,

which is equally required of Romanists in the same article of the papal creed. And to these also, as well as to the originals themselves, miraculous virtues are ascribed, and prodigies without number are affirmed to have been effected by them ; imminent perils averted, inveterate diseases healed, pestilences stayed, * armies of aliens turned to flight, by the presence of the mortal remains or cast-off garments of the saints. And so unlimited is the extent of this credulity that, unless we had their own testimony against themselves, it would be deemed a gross injustice towards the existing members of the Romish church in this country, to believe them capable of it. The histories of all nations in their earlier periods are full of marvellous events and supernatural prodigies, which invariably cease when civilization and knowledge have dispelled the clouds of ignorance, and awakened the reasoning faculties of the mind ; and tales of wonder which shock probability,

* As the Persians by the hair-shirt of St. Theodosius, &c. &c. &c. vol. I. of Butler's Lives of Saints, published by Murphy, London, 1821.

and are inconsistent with all experience, and irreconcileable with the order established by the providence of God among the works of his creation, are deservedly set down to the account of folly and imposture, and are no longer believed, because no one has an interest in procuring them belief. And such must have been the fate of the ridiculous miracles of the dark ages, if they had not been necessary to support the authority of that infallible church, which has undertaken to accredit them, and in so doing has staked her own infallibility upon their truth.

In estimating the motives and characters of individuals, much must undoubtedly be allowed to the force of early impressions, and the influence of education, upon the most candid minds; and it would be unjust to tax with conscious insincerity persons labouring under such disadvantages, when we find them still professing their belief of such absurdities, and endeavouring to draw others into it. In itself, however, it is matter of just astonishment, when we see men of great natural acuteness, and no

mean attainments in literature, labouring, as the most distinguished of modern Roman Catholic divines in the united kingdom have done, to perpetuate this mental blindness, and to persuade the world that this wonder-working power continually exercised is a standing testimony of the Almighty in favour of their church. It exhibits, indeed, a very awful warning to all, who are not themselves within the vortex of error, to hold fast to the truth; while at the same time it is more equitable to attribute things, which cannot be justified on rational principles, to the system of religion maintained by that church, which denies to any of her members the unfettered use of their own reason, than to the individuals who have been trained up in it, and have devoted themselves to its support^y. Bound by her authority to exercise their talents in defence of things not only above reason, which many things may be which are yet essentially true, but contrary to reason, which nothing can be, which is not essen-

^y Milner, Murray, and Doyle; the two last of whom wrote to establish the belief of Hohenlohe's miracles.

tially false; it is too likely that the clearness and unity of perception which are congenial to the study and love of truth will in their minds be impaired by the necessity of finding arguments to palliate and justify those defects in their system which can only be maintained by the utmost efforts of sophistry against reason and probability.

We find not in the creed, imposed by the pope after the council of Trent, any express mention of angels; but the invocation of them forms a part of Romish worship, and is equally inculcated by the same ^z author from whom I have before quoted the exhortation for praying to saints: “ You “ believe, no doubt,” says he, “ that you “ have a guardian angel appointed by God “ to protect you;” to which, adding an irrelevant quotation from scripture, he proceeds, “ address yourself to this blessed spirit with gratitude, veneration, and confidence.”

Foreseeing, however, the objections which protestants might make to this doctrine of

^z Milner, End of Religious Controversy, Letter 33. Part III.

angel-worship, not only as inconsistent with the general tenor of scripture, but expressly forbidden by St. Paul, who attributes it to the vanity of a fleshly mind, intruding into those things which it hath not seen, and not holding the Head, that is, the true doctrine of Christ the only Mediator ; with an attempt to deceive, which cannot be reprobated with adequate severity in a matter of such awful importance, he hesitates not to assure his reader, “^a that the worship of “ angels, condemned by the apostle, means “ only the worship of the fallen or wicked “ angels, whom Christ despoiled, and which “ was paid to them by Simon the magician “ and his followers, as the makers of the “ world.” Simon Magus and the Manicheans seem to haunt the imaginations of Roman Catholic divines ; they see the vestiges of them every where, except in their own unerring church ; and whatever they wish to bring into the greatest odium, in utter contempt of reason and probability, is commonly referred to their inventions. But

^a Milner from Hawarden. End of Religious Controversy, Letter 35, Part III.

the present is a difficulty, out of which even Simon Magus cannot help them.

The text of St. Paul is too plain to be mistaken by any one who wishes to know his meaning, and in fact bears a strong resemblance to that passage in his Epistle to the Romans, to which I adverted in a former part of this Lecture, where he attributes the corruptions of the heathen to the neglect of that which they might have known concerning the invisible God from the contemplation of his visible works ; the consequence of which was, *that professing themselves wise, they became fools* ; and in like manner he attributes the voluntary humility of worshipping angels, as we have just now seen, to the vanity of a fleshly mind, intruding into those secret things which God has not revealed to man. It is impossible to torture this into a prohibition against imitating Simon Magus and his followers. When the tempter approached our Lord, he repulsed his suggestions with these pregnant words, ^b *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only*

^b Matth. iv. 10.

shalt thou serve. And surely it must have been a very unnecessary caution in the apostle, to warn those to whom he had himself preached the gospel, that it was inconsistent with their religion to worship evil spirits, the enemies of God and man, and from whose power the Son of God came down from heaven to deliver them. It was against the voluntary humility, as the apostle speaks, of worshipping good angels, beings superior indeed to man, but inferior to God, and possessing and exercising no power or influence but what it may please God to impart to them, that the apostle's caution was designed. Such a practice he considers inconsistent with the command of God and the worship due to Him alone, as well as derogatory to the sole mediation of Christ, *“who is the Head over all things to his church.* No truth can possibly be clearer than this, to those who seek the knowledge of their religion in the scripture, and it will be a vain attempt, by the forced interpretation of any insulated text, to cast a plausible doubt upon it. Hardly

• Ephes. i. 22.

will tradition itself avail them here, since even the church of Rome does not contend that tradition is to be obeyed in direct opposition to scripture.

Would Roman Catholics, therefore, but consult the scripture with unbiassed minds, and understand it in its own unadulterated sense—not merely in that which a pretended infallible church, systematically sinning against its plainest truths, and dreading that its own corruptions may be exposed by its light, deems it necessary to fix upon it—happier days would dawn upon the Christian world, and the reign of error hasten to its close: the unsightly pile of heathenish superstition, erected in the darkest ages upon credulity and fear, and guarded by anathemas against the influx of light, which might expose the rottenness of its foundations, would fall to pieces, and the true church of Christ be renewed in the beauty of holiness and the majesty of truth.

LECTURE VII.

DEUT. iv. 15.

Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves : for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire.

FROM the veneration and invocation of saints, which was particularly discussed in my last Lecture, the transition is easy to the still grosser abomination of honouring and venerating images, which I have reserved for the subject-matter of the present ; both being equally of pagan origin, and, however modified or refined, essentially inconsistent with true religion.

St. Paul, arguing the superiority of the gospel to the law, tells the ^a Galatians, that the law had been to the Jews as a school-master to bring them to Christ ; that is, a less perfect dispensation of religion, suited to the times and circumstances in which it

^a Gal. iii. 24.

was given, and under the discipline of which they were to be prepared for that more perfect and spiritual, which was in the appointed time to be revealed by Christ.

One great purpose of the law, therefore, was to wean them from the corruptions of the heathen nations by whom they were surrounded, and which, as their whole history proves, they were at all periods antecedent to the Babylonish captivity so prone to imitate. But among those heathenish corruptions of religion there is none more striking, nor any against which they are more frequently and earnestly cautioned, or deterred from the practice of it by more terrible denunciations of divine anger, than that of idolatry or image-worship.

It cannot be necessary to make appeals either to the law or the prophets in support of so notorious and incontrovertible a truth; but it is very important to observe, that it is not merely against making the likeness of any such imaginary being, whether good or evil, as those which were worshipped by the heathen, which is prohibited. Not even the making of any graven image is al-

lowed, whether as a representation or memorial of the true God ; of whom, as they are reminded in the text, they *saw no similitude*, when he spake unto them in Horeb, at the giving of the law, with all the fearful circumstances attending it.

Now it seems to follow, as a necessary conclusion from these premises, that if image-worship of any kind was too gross, and unworthy of the Deity, to be allowed to a people so little refined in understanding as the Israelites were in the days of Moses; and if it seemed good to the divine Wisdom to punish the violation of the commandment by which it is forbidden with the heaviest judgments, and to suffer no relaxation of its strictness till the end of that dispensation ; that it never can be consistent with the spiritual perfection of the Christian dispensation, of which the Mosaic was but the shadow, to tolerate the introduction of it as a mode or accompaniment of Christian worship.

And whereas our Lord declares that he
^b *came not to destroy the law or the pro-*

^b Matth v. 17.

phets, but to fulfil them, it is surely incredible that his religion should have gone directly against the law and the prophets in a matter of such vital importance, without at least some distinct avowal of the intended change, or some explanation of the reason for adopting it, as we find in other instances where a new commandment is given to supersede an ancient and received opinion or practice.

But so far is this from being the case, that in the whole compass of the New Testament not a single sentence is found which can afford the slightest semblance of an apology for image-worship; nor is the mention of it ever introduced, unless in the way of reprobation, and for the purpose of warning the Gentile converts to have no fellowship with it.

Yet, notwithstanding the most explicit and positive authority both of the Old and New Testament to the contrary, the second Nicene council dared to assert, that the worship of images was an apostolical tradition; and the council of Trent, which has adopted in general the errors of all its predeces-

sors, has reaffirmed this in the most direct and unequivocal terms; and the pope, who sanctioned its decrees, has reduced it into an article of the faith, out of which, it is for ever reiterated, that no one can be saved; “^c That the images of Christ and of the “ever Virgin mother of God,” (may I be pardoned for giving utterance to such impiety!) “moreover of the other saints, are to “be had and retained, and that due honour “and veneration are to be shewn to them.” Here again, as in the case of the invocation and veneration of saints and angels, the church of Rome, in resting her doctrine concerning the veneration of images on apostolical tradition, has in effect placed tradition in direct contradiction to the acknowledged written word of the same apostles; whose authority she thus most mendaciously claims for a practice not only not sanctioned, but either expressly or constructively condemned by every one of them in their Epistles addressed to the universal Christian community, or to the

^c Creed of pope Pius, Art. 9.

particular churches severally founded by them.

But the direct and positive authority of the law and the gospel, though abundantly sufficient to convict the church of Rome of enormous corruption in the instance before us, is by no means the whole strength of the case against her.

There is, besides, a negative testimony against the possibility of the apostles ever having taught or countenanced image-worship, than which nothing more conclusive can be desired, to disprove so groundless and so shameless a fiction.

It will not be denied by any one in the least conversant with the history and opinions of the Jews, subsequent to their return from captivity, that image-worship was thenceforward to their final dispersion held in the greatest abhorrence by them; that they had endured the utmost cruelty from Antiochus Epiphanes, because they would not yield to his attempts to force that and other heathenish rites upon them; and that at a much later period they were objects of ridicule to Roman wits and satir-

ists^d for their scrupulous adherence to their own laws and customs, and in particular for their singular resistance to this almost universal usage of paganism. It is not less undeniable, that the rulers of the Jews in the days of the apostles and their successors, till the destruction of Jerusalem and the dissolution of their national polity, were animated with the most furious zeal against Christianity, and persecuted its professors wherever their power or influence extended. According to our Saviour's prediction within a very short time after his ascension his disciples were brought before rulers and kings for his name's sake ; and various crimes were laid to their charge, with the hope of crushing Christianity in its infancy by rendering them suspected to magistrates and odious to the people. In pursuance of this design they are accused of blasphemy, sedition, deceiving the people, and designing the subversion of the law of Moses ; by which last charge such a tumult was raised against St. Paul, upon his first appearance

^d Nil præter nubes, et cœli numen adorant. Juv.

in the temple after many years' absence from Jerusalem, that he was saved only by the interposition of military force from the hasty vengeance of the enraged multitude. And whether by private conspiracy, or open violence, or false accusation, no efforts were spared to effect the destruction of the first preachers of the Christian faith.

This is a fact which must be conceded both by the friends and enemies of Christianity, and is certainly not denied by the church of Rome.

Is it then credible, if the apostles, as that church dares to assert, had taught a doctrine or introduced a practice upon the alleged foundation of the new religion which they were sent to announce to the world, so contrary as well to the law as to the prophets, to both of which the Jews amidst all their corruptions were so zealously attached, as that of image-worship, that it would not have been brought as a charge against them by any of their implacable adversaries, who were so eager to compass their destruction? or that they would have failed to employ so effectual an argument to prevent the

further progress of the Christian religion, if it had been possible for them to shew to the Jewish nation its near affinity to paganism in one of its most offensive features? Assuredly not.

As, therefore, no such attempt was ever made, where it is evident that no accusation would have been omitted, which had the smallest appearance of probability; and still less one which, if it could have been substantiated, must have proved fatal to the cause of Christianity, we are justified by this consideration in asserting, that it is an instance of audacious impiety to endeavour to fix upon the inspired apostles the original guilt of this grievous corruption of our holy religion, which they were sent to teach to all nations, and qualified by the extraordinary gift of the Holy Ghost for the fulfilment of their mission; while at the same time so false an imputation affords a conclusive argument against the authority of papal councils, to which the adherents of Rome demand implicit submission, and affirm that their decisions are infallible.

That the practice of image-worship was introduced into the church at an early period, though long after the age of the apostles, there can be no doubt ; and its perpetuation in that of Rome down to this present time is one of the most irrefragable proofs of the fatal effects of placing tradition, by which it is attempted to justify it, on a level with scripture.

For thus to prove that an error, however gross, is both ancient and widely diffused, is, on their principles, sufficient to make it pass for truth. It becomes forthwith a part of tradition ; and as no superior authority is acknowledged by the advocates of tradition, to which an appeal may be made against it, no remedy remains ; but corruptions which have crept into religion through fraud, fanaticism, or ignorance, during the darkness of remote ages, must be retained for ever as integral parts of it.

But if image-worship be not an apostolical tradition, which no man who is not bound to defend inveterate error can possibly pretend that it is, to what exact pe-

riod its origin may be referred is a matter of no real importance. That it was introduced into the church by Gentile converts, or adopted, in a most reprehensible spirit of worldly wisdom, by perfidious guardians of the faith, to draw over with less difficulty those who had been accustomed “to the ‘pomps and vanities’ of paganism, when the powers of the world professed themselves Christian, seems unquestionable. The account which the younger Pliny gives to Trajan in the beginning of the second century concerning the simple worship of the early Christians, which it had been his official duty to investigate, is no bad authority for asserting that it had not then begun. We will admit that if it was, properly speaking, a question relative to an article of Christian theology, or the interpretation of a disputed doctrine, the testimony of a heathen magistrate could have but little weight in the determination of it. But the point at issue in the present case is a mere matter of fact, of which any impartial man might be a competent voucher; and where there was no partiality to warp

his judgment, there can be no ground to except against his veracity. “ They affirmed,” says he, i. e. those who were brought before him on the charge of being Christians, “ that the sum of their fault or “ error was this, that they were accustomed “ to assemble before light on a stated day, “ and to sing a hymn to Christ as to a God ; “ to bind themselves by a solemn oath to “ no wickedness ; but not to commit theft, “ robbery, or adultery ; not to break their “ word, nor to refuse to restore a trust when “ called upon ; after which it was their cus-“ tom to separate, and to meet together “ again to take food, promiscuously how-“ ever, and innocently.”

We have here no mention of images of Christ or the blessed Virgin, or the saints, nor even of transubstantiated wafers and the sacrifice of the mass ; which on the authority of tradition an author^f, from whom I have largely quoted before, asserts to have been celebrated “ through a great part

e. Epistle 97.

f Milner, End of Religious Controversy, Part III.
p. 54. Letter 37.

“ of the known world, before even St. Matthew’s gospel was promulgated.” And yet it seems scarcely possible that a writer apparently so accurate as Pliny should have entirely omitted to notice such things, if they had then existed among Christians, who were at the same time objects of so much jealous vigilance and cruel persecution; more especially as he mentions the images of the gods and of the emperor, to which he subsequently states that he compelled those accused of being Christians to offer incense, and to address supplications, as a test to which no true Christian could be induced to submit. Yet the wisest of those who are still held in the fetters of Romish infallibility, with the letter and spirit of all scripture against them, still contend for this undoubted offspring of paganism with as much apparent earnestness, as if they had the unequivocal testimony of the law and the gospel in their favour^s.

A consciousness however that all is not

^s Vide Bossuet, Milner, and Doyle’s Parliamentary Examinations.

right evidently betrays itself in their mode of arguing in defence of it, and more especially in their endeavours to suppress the second commandment, by which image-worship is so strongly condemned, or to explain it away and invalidate its force; which they could have no more reason for doing in the case of that particular command, than of any other precept or prohibition of the Decalogue, if they were not intimately sensible that the practice of their church is in direct opposition to it; while, at the same time, the reasons which they assign for it are so evasive and unsatisfactory, that, how much soever charity may require us to abstain from the imputation of unworthy motives, it is difficult to conceive how men, at once enlightened and sincere, could ever have recourse to them for the support of a cause which themselves believed to be founded in essential truth.

To the same sense of its inherent offensiveness must we attribute the endeavour to palliate the practice of venerating images and relicks, by bestowing upon them the plausible appellations of religious memo-

rials and types of Christianity; as if material objects, whether the perishable work of men's hands, or the miserable remains of mortality, the latter of which nature itself prompts us to conceal from the sight of the living, and to restore to the earth from whence they were taken, could with any propriety be considered as evidences of spiritual truths, or appropriate monuments of a religion which is to be diffused through the whole world, and to last till the consummation of all things.

They tell us, however, that it is a relative worship only which they pay to images, and that the council of Trent in forbidding to believe "^h that there is any divinity or "virtue in them for which they should be "reverenced, or that any thing is to be "asked of them, or any confidence is to be "placed in them, but on the contrary, that "the honour given should be referred to "those whom they represent," has established characteristic marks to distinguish Romanists from idolaters; "since, so far

^h Bossuet, Exposition of Catholic Doctrine.

“ from believing as they did, that any divinity resides in images, Romanists attribute no other virtue to them than that of reminding them more sensibly of their great originals.” These, however, are but imaginary distinctions between the image-worship of Romanists and pagans, as it would be easy to prove by a multitude of examples. Juvenal, Seneca, and the elder Pliny, nearly agree in the same sentiment, “that their gods,” referring to the early ages of the Roman commonwealth, “seemed to be most propitious when their statues were moulded in clay, and not cast in gold ;” which sufficiently shows that the original and the representation were not confounded in the mind of the worshipper, as the author of this pretended distinction would have it believed, even among nations which were ignorant of the true God ; but that the image-worship of the pagans was, like that of the church of Rome, a relative worship, not addressed to the carved or molten figure, but to the being designated

ⁱ Plin: lib. XIV. 13.

by it. And the very ground of the prohibition, under the Mosaic dispensation, to make any visible object of such relative honour, was, that which is inseparable from it, in its tendency to inspire gross and unworthy conceptions of the Deity, as if the Supreme Being, whom our blessed Lord declares to be *a Spirit*, whom no man hath seen or can see,^k was *like to corruptible man*, and to lead the ignorant to believe that such objects had intrinsically something divine and adorable in them. And notwithstanding the asserted caution of the council of Trent to prevent such misconceptions, it is very evident that the church of Rome has not escaped the danger, but has^l *received in herself that recompense of her error*, which a presumptuous transgression of the divine commands never fails to draw after it. For it is a matter of the utmost notoriety, that her members^m *are still carried away to dumb idols*, like the Gentiles, from whom they imagine themselves sufficiently distinguished by the groundless plea of relative worship.

^k Rom. i. 23. ^l Rom. i. 27. . ^m 1 Cor. xii. 2.

The histories of miraculous images, and the wonders wrought by them, are found in Roman Catholic authors of high reputation ; and the superstitious legends of that sort, which are still prevalent in Roman Catholic countries far exceed in number and extravagance the prodigies recorded in all that remains to us of pagan antiquity. But again, in derogation to the above-mentioned caution of the council of Trent, practically it is not true that images are used in the church of Rome only as religious memorials, to excite the attention of the worshippers, and to awaken the fervour of piety. For if that were the sole purpose intended, it must necessarily follow, that all images, as representations of the same originals, being equally fitted to answer that purpose, would, unless for the costliness of the materials, be held in equal estimation : but this neither is nor ever has been the real state of the case.

In every Roman Catholic country there have been in all ages certain images of superior sanctity, to which costly offerings have been made, and pilgrimages perform-

ed; in return for which testimonies of devotion, spiritual and temporal favours, in great abundance and variety, have been promised to those who perform such meritorious acts of piety; and if there be any thing in these practices contrary to the intention of the church of Rome, which can hardly be allowed, considering her jealous vigilance and absolute power to suppress whatever may be contrary to her doctrine and discipline, it is still not the less a fearful proof of the extreme danger of departing from the plain sense of the word of God, however plausibly it may be palliated, or however circumspectly it may be attempted to limit the departure. It proves indeed, in a striking manner, the truth of the saying of Samuel to Saul, that *n^o rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft*, and that when men have presumed to set up their own reasonings or inventions against the commands of God, they know not to what lengths they shall be ultimately carried, nor how fatal the consequences will be of overleaping that inviolable barrier.

ⁿ 1 Sam. xv. 23.

Certain, however, it is, that the church of Rome, far from disapproving, has highly favoured these superstitions. In this country, indeed, where the spirit of that church is kept in check by fear of the censures of protestants, great pains have been taken by her adherents to exhibit the practice of image-worship, as well as the other most offensive characteristics of popery, under the most innoxious aspect, and to obtrude it as little as possible upon public observation. But this is the effect of policy only, in which that church is seldom deficient; not an abandonment of the idolatrous principle, which, being incorporated into the papal creed, is equally held by all her true and sincere members in every country.

Popery, to be known, must be seen in the ascendancy, where, unrestrained by policy or fear, she displays her gorgeous vanities with conscious pride; where patron saints are enshrined in almost every church, and the image of the holy Virgin, splendidly attired, and adorned with the ensigns of royalty, sits enthroned like the deity of

the temple, and is venerated by kneeling crowds.

The time was, when the same religious drama was acted here, and devotees went in pilgrimage to images of the like description, which were supposed to possess peculiar virtues, and to be endowed with transcendent sanctity, from all regions of the land; till the light of divine truth, which shone out with the reformation, despoiled them at once of their miraculous powers and their glory, and consigned them, like the idols of the house of Israel, "to the moles and to the bats."

But hardly can any thing in heathen annals vie with the honours paid to the fabled virgin of Loretto, a perfect counterpart to the great goddess Diana of the Ephesians, whose image fell down from Jupiter, except, indeed, that the popish fabrication far exceeds in audacious impiety and falsehood its pagan original; and yet such is the debasing influence of superstition among the votaries of Romish infalli-

◦ Isaiah ii. 20.

bility, that the greatest princes in Christendom^p, not presuming to question the veracity of the mortal^q who dared to call himself the vicar of Christ upon earth, seeing that so monstrous an experiment upon human credulity was first sanctioned, as there is the strongest reason for believing also that it had been secretly contrived by him, have been emulous to evince their piety by the costliness of their offerings to this miraculous image; whose sanctuary, at no distant period, was full of gold and silver and precious stones, and round whose walls myriads of pilgrims, of every age, sex, and condition, went annually upon their knees^r; nor is there any reason for supposing that the practice is yet discontinued.

It would be difficult to conceive that these are relative honours only, which are paid to this far-famed similitude of the blessed Virgin, and that it is not, in the

^p Among the rest our James the Second.

^q Boniface the Eighth.

^r "On affirme &c. que dans les années du plus grand concours on a diverses fois compté deux cens mille pelerins et plus," &c. Voyage d'Italie, 1702, à la Haye.

opinion of its worshippers, possessed of any intrinsic properties which are not common to it with every other representation of the same person in wood or stone, and that it has always been regarded only as “a memorial of Christianity,” to kindle piety and excite devout affections, as the modern apologists of image-worship would have us believe. And if this plea cannot be here admitted, nor in other instances of veneration paid to miraculous images of the same kind, though of less extensive celebrity, which are found in almost every Roman Catholic country, to what, after all, does it amount, but genuine, undeniable idolatry, only less to be reprobated than that of the heathen, inasmuch as the object of it is a holy and innocent creature, highly favoured indeed of God, but not elevated above the level of human kind; whereas the images of the heathen were the representatives either of evil or imaginary beings?

The worship of saints, if ever so well en-

^s See Russell's Tour in Germany, published in 1825, vol. ii. chap. 6. for an account of the annual pilgrimage from Vienna to Mariazell.

titled to that appellation, is an unwarranted invasion of the honour due to God alone, and a truly presumptuous sin in those who authorize and enjoin it ; but to pay even to their graven or molten images and pictures, fashioned after the imaginations of painters and sculptors, that sort of relative honour which pagans paid to the images of their gods, is at once so contrary to scripture and reason, and the very first principles of true religion ; so debasing to the mind of man, and so apt to inspire in the simple and uneducated, if not in the more enlightened of those who are addicted to it, unworthy notions of the being and attributes and providence of God, that we cannot wonder when we see whole communities, which have adopted such a carnalized system of Christianity, immersed in the most infatuated and demoralizing superstition ; and while they manifest the most bigoted zeal in the cause of that church which instils into their minds, from the tenderest infancy, her atrocious doctrine of exclusive salvation, regardless of those weightier matters of the Christian law which their Lord

and Master exacts of all his disciples as the proof of their love and faith in him.

The injury which Christianity has suffered from the corruptions of faith, doctrine, and worship, introduced and engrafted upon it by the church of Rome, is not, however, confined within her own pale.

It is one of the unfounded boasts of Romish writers, that their religion has overspread the globe, and that numberless nations, differing in language, customs, and manners, have been brought to *the obedience of the faith* by the labours of their missionaries: and it would indeed be most unjust to deny to many individuals of their church the praise of laborious zeal and well-meant endeavours.

But yet, unless among the uncivilized and unreasoning tribes of America, who, for the most part, still continue in the grossest ignorance, though partially reclaimed from savage life, and brought to a compliance with the external formalities of the church of Rome, their success has

either been very small, or the effects of it very transient^t.

But there is another race of men who seem to want nothing but a true religion to place them nearly on a level with the Christian world ; on whose minds the sight of such corruptions as we impute to the church of Rome would of necessity produce the most prejudicial impressions against Christianity, of which they suppose them to be essential parts.

The principal nations which have embraced the Mahometan imposture lie round the coasts of the Mediterranean sea, over-against the chief seats of the Romish faith, and have no opportunity of seeing Christianity under any other form than that which is exhibited in those countries, if perchance they visit them, or in the fallen church of unhappy Greece, which too nearly resembles that of Rome ; having in a former age renounced its dominion, but not its errors, which both have alike derived

^t Vide the Memoir of the Abbé Dubois concerning their converts in India.

from the polytheism and idolatry which were common to their pagan ancestors. Of the pure and spiritual worship which Christ enjoined to his disciples, they have seen or heard nothing ; but instead of it, the adoration of the host, processions and genuflexions, with the abominations of the carnival, juggling miracles, and images and relicks exhibited to the gaze of besotted multitudes.

Among much that is false, fabulous, immoral, and unworthy of the Deity in the Mahometan doctrine, there are some things also which are laudable and good, and in near accordance with the Jewish and Christian scriptures, from which they were undoubtedly borrowed. Of these the most prominent are the great and fundamental truth concerning the unity of God, and the strict prohibition and utter abhorrence of every species of idolatry, in which the Koran may be said to reecho the language of the Bible. It is, without doubt, in consequence of their tenacious adherence to these great principles, that they have hitherto looked with scorn on those forms of

Christianity which have been presented to them ; and in which, although the same cardinal truths are professed, they are so little regarded in practice, and so overlaid with corruptions, that those who are without may well suppose that they form no part of the Christian faith.

And though we doubt not that all things work together for ultimate good, as well as for the glory of God, we can hardly avoid believing that this has been the instrumental cause of what is otherwise contrary to all experience, and might be considered an unaccountable phenomenon in human affairs ; viz. that a race just emerging from barbarism, such as the early followers of Mahomet, and more particularly the Ottoman conquerors of the eastern empire were, having subjugated, by force of arms, nations immeasurably superior to themselves in every kind of knowledge ; and being by the occupation of the conquered countries brought into frequent communication with other states professing the same religion as their conquered subjects, have yet continued for ages a totally

distinct people, attached to their own false religion by the force of a few immutable truths blended with it, and prejudiced against the true by the adscititious falsehoods with which it has been deformed.

For the same reasons the Jews have been hardened in unbelief, and few, if any converts have been gained among them in popish countries, unless by the unchristian means of persecution and force.

But this is not the heaviest of the injuries to religion which are justly chargeable upon the church of Rome.

It was from her corruptions that the sect of atheistical sophists who sprung out of her bosom in the last century, in a country whose sovereigns assumed the title of Most Christian, derived all their power to injure Christianity, and ultimately to produce by the venom of their principles those dreadful convulsions and sanguinary contests which make up the eventful but instructive history of our times. It was against the bigotry, the frauds, the impostures, the corruptions, the iniquities, and superstitions of the church of Rome, that the main ef-

forts of a host of infidel assailants were directed; while the venerable truths of real Christianity, polluted by the contagion of the impious falsehoods which a worldly-minded church had associated with them, were subjected to the blasphemous contumely of men who knew them only by their misrepresentation. And as the defenders of that church had nothing but tradition without scripture, authority without reason or probability, to oppose to their attacks, the issue, without a miracle in her favour, could not have been otherwise than it was. She fell by the hands of her own children, which she had armed against herself; and the unparalleled depravity which instantly burst forth, as soon as the power of coercion was removed, is an unanswerable proof of the tendency of such a system to destroy the salutary influence of true religion, which it transfers from the mind to the senses, and leaves the heart almost in the disorder and impurity of unregenerate nature. Again, indeed, beyond apparent probability she has risen from her ruins, and exhibits her ancient character unchanged.

ed, and her external proportions almost undiminished. But of this we may be fully certain, that until the light of unadulterated truth shall have pervaded the dark recesses of the temple, and Christianity shall have been purged from corruption and restored to its original perfection, as the reasonable service of regenerated man to his Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, whatever pains may be taken to repair and beautify the out-walls, the glory of God will not dwell within the sanctuary.

It is in vain that Romanists pretend, that if the church had become corrupt, as protestants assert, the promise of Christ, *that the gates of hell should not prevail against it*, must have failed.

The correction of error and the removal of corruption are the means employed by Divine Providence to insure the accomplishment of that promise, which is not to be assumed as an argument *à priori* that the church shall never err, as they would represent it; for then it must apply to every branch of the universal church with equal force, and neither heresy nor error of any

kind could ever have found an entrance into it, but that its errors shall not be suffered to proceed to such lengths as to cause its destruction ; nor are the friends of the reformation at all concerned to shew that some particular church always existed, which preserved whole and undefiled the true faith, such as they define it to be, with a suitable form of worship, and which needed no reformation. This is a difficulty which the champions of the papal cause are fond of proposing to us, but which we are not at all concerned to solve. It has in fact no connexion with the issue of the controversy between us and them ; for the decision of which it is not necessary to ransack ecclesiastical antiquities, nor to look beyond those proofs which are ever within our reach. Either we are in sinful schism, or they are in dangerous apostasy from the truth : this is the impassable gulf by which we are reciprocally divided, and they can only make good their cause against us, by proving that the charges brought against their church at the reformation were unfounded, and that the errors of faith and

worship, which protestants still impute to them with equal constancy, are in very deed not errors, but true expositions of Christian doctrine, and suitable ways of serving "*the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity*. And unless they can prove this, and that too not from the authority of fathers and decrees of councils, convoked and influenced in their deliberations by the Roman pontiffs, nor by the unwritten traditions of their church, but from holy scripture alone, which all true Christians believe to ^x* *have been given by the inspiration of God*, and which ought to be the last resort in all their differences, it will be evident to all impartial inquirers after truth that their church had falsely pretended to infallibility, that it had erred in things of high and awful moment, and that reformation was indispensable to preserve the light which was still left in her from becoming total darkness. By such authority only can controversy be decided to the benefit of both, and the satisfaction of either party.

^u Isaiah lvii. 15.

^x 2 Tim. iii. 16.

If the Romish doctrines and practices, which have been discussed at large concerning tradition, transubstantiation, invocation of saints, and worship of images, are of such a nature, that no Christian who knows the scriptures can honestly subscribe to their truth, nor conform to the institutions, forms of worship, and professions of faith founded upon them, without stifling the remonstrances of his own conscience and dissembling before God, then, without looking for additional causes, or laying any stress on temporary or adventitious reasons, it must be admitted, by every man who believes it his duty to *worship God in spirit and in truth*, that reformation was imperatively necessary; and if, either through judicial blindness or selfish policy, the highest authorities in the church at that momentous crisis obstinately resisted all reformation, and sought to secure and perpetuate their power by persecuting even to death all those who protested against the reigning errors and corruptions, then must it equally be acknowledged, that separation from her communion and re-

nunciation of her authority were fully justified by the necessity of the case, as the only conditions on which that reformation, so earnestly desired by all good men, was to be obtained.

Here, therefore, we may safely rest the justification of our cause, without regard to the studied mistakings or railing accusations of our adversaries. But if to these weightier reasons for casting off the yoke of papal supremacy any addition were required, we might still insist upon other abuses and corruptions of that church, which, although of inferior moment to those on which I have principally dwelt, are yet, as I have observed on a former occasion, of no slight importance, nor unworthy of a special refutation, if it had been compatible with the prescribed limits, or necessary to the design announced in the commencement of these Lectures; which was, not to exhibit a perfect view of the causes of the reformation, but to shew by an unexaggerated statement of the most prominent of them, that on religious grounds, exclusive of all worldly considerations, it was not

only justifiable, but indispensably necessary. Of those accessory causes to which I have made this general allusion, the first place is due to the heathenish fiction of purgatory, with its cognate appendages of masses for the dead and indulgences for sin, which, however palliated or explained, are utterly inconsistent with the Christian verity, and pregnant with hurtful superstition and dangerous delusion. Nor should we leave wholly unnoticed auricular confession, with absolutions and penances at the discretion of the priest, besides other obnoxious claims and practices, which appear to have no other object than that of drawing advantage from the vices and fears of mankind, and exalting the power of the priesthood, to whom, in all things relating to religion, the laity are kept in a state of pupilage and abject dependance. These are still among the great practical evils of the papal system, for the most part incorporated with the creed, and perpetuated by the assumed infallibility of the church, evils which its most strenuous advocates study rather to disguise and palliate, than

openly to defend against the objections of protestants ; nor need we, in pursuance of the design with which we set out, enter into a detailed examination of them, nor investigate the moral and religious mischiefs of which they are the necessary source ; and as they are tenable on no ground save that of tradition, if it has been shewn by satisfactory arguments, that tradition is destitute of all authority as a rule of faith and morals, in refuting the principle, whatever is deduced from it is equally refuted with it. But that I may here be permitted to repeat what has before been in substance remarked, if tradition cannot support the monstrous system of corruptions founded upon it, these very corruptions do on the contrary afford a conclusive evidence against tradition, which is thus employed for purposes inconsistent in many respects with the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and, as it may be proved by irrefragable arguments, injurious to holiness and purity of life, which it is one of the first objects of Christianity to promote.

I trust that I have in some degree, though yet I fear very imperfectly, fulfilled the main purpose of these Lectures; that I have shewn, even by the partial review of the leading differences between us, which I have been able to take, that the separation of our church from that of Rome was not founded upon worldly interests, or political expediency, or temporary causes of any kind, as Romish writers have untruly represented; and consequently that the secular advantages which may have subsequently accrued to this nation from it, and which in the promotion of every thing conducive to moral or political good are great beyond all estimation, were not the ends contemplated by our reformers; nor are such the arguments with which, as sincere Christians, we would attempt to vindicate such a measure, if it could not be justified on grounds strictly and purely religious.

It is indeed the duty of every Christian state, not only to secure the peaceful exercise of religion in general, but to provide for the religious wants of its people by affording public support to some definite

form of faith and worship; nor among the many important questions on which legislative wisdom may be called to decide, can there be any of greater importance to the governed, nor of more awful responsibility to their rulers, under whatever form or nominal distinction the sovereign power may be administered, than that of choosing rightly between the different religious denominations, which may claim to themselves to be true and legitimate Christian churches. By the merciful direction of divine Providence, that of which we are members has been established and preserved as the national church of this kingdom; and of its fitness and efficacy in promoting all the valuable ends of true religion; and securing to us, publicly and individually, the innumerable benefits resulting from it, the most satisfactory evidence is visible to all, whose minds are sufficiently enlightened to form a correct judgment concerning so high and momentous a subject. But let it be always remembered, that in defending her sacred authority against adversaries of any description, her temporal state adds no-

thing to our strength. Her battles must be fought, not under the shield of the law, but with *the whole armour of God*. And though every good Christian will bow for conscience sake to the laws of his country, in every thing to which human laws can rightly extend, the cause of his religion must be maintained with no other arguments than those which can be drawn from the word of God, to which all sincere Christians must yield assent, and the principles of right reason, though they may not entirely agree in the interpretation of the one, or the application of the other.

With these observations I take leave of this subject, and have only to express my anxious hope, that by the imperfect execution of what I have attempted, I may not have weakened the cause which it is my earnest desire to serve, while at the same time I am sensible that well-meaning zeal is no sufficient apology for such a failure.

If such should be the judgment of my hearers, may the blame fall upon the advocate only; and as a great portion of the younger part of them are destined for the

sacred ministry, may they be only so much the more strongly impressed with the necessity of diligently cultivating professional studies, and especially of endeavouring to make themselves masters of a subject, which, though for a while dormant, has now resumed its former station in the field of theological controversy, and seems likely to retain it through their generation ; and the ignorance or defective knowledge of which may render them incompetent guardians of the flocks committed to their charge.

It remains for me now, in the closing Lecture of this series, according to my original intention, to take some notice of the subjects of debate between our church, and the various sects of Protestant Dissenters—to endeavour to remove misapprehensions, and to suggest reasons for laying aside all party spirit in religion, and ceasing to keep up causeless divisions ; the effect of which is most injurious to the progress of truth, strengthens the otherwise worthless arguments of our common adversaries, and disposes men of worldly minds, and indifferent to the truth, who form too large a portion

of every community, to prefer the spiritual slavery and Cimmerian darkness of Rome to religious light and liberty perversely and ungratefully abused. Amen.

LECTURE VIII.

JEREMIAH vi. 16.

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

THESE words of the prophet, addressed to the perverse and erring people of Judah, are pregnant with instruction for those who desire to serve God acceptably, under the Christian as well as the Mosaic dispensation.

At all times entitled to the most serious consideration, they are peculiarly applicable to the subject which I have reserved for the conclusion of these Lectures, inasmuch as they suggest to us, though figuratively yet very distinctly, the proper object of religious inquiry, the end at which it ought to terminate, and the happy effects of rightly using the knowledge acquired by it; *ye shall find rest for your souls.*

In matters of abstract science, an extravagant deference to antiquity, and a too implicit confidence in received opinions, serve only to impede the progress of improvement; and the mind engaged in such researches, where even error leads to no practical evil, having no light but that of nature to direct it, and no landmarks to observe, but those which its own previous discoveries have ascertained, is confined within no limits which it may not endeavour to overpass.

But in things of positive institution, or of which the extent is limited by their own nature, or the causes from which they are derived; as revealed religion, law, or moral obligation, there are limits beyond which inquiry cannot be carried, consistently with the quality of the subject upon which it is exercised, nor speculation safely indulged. But although the bounds of practical religion, in which sense alone it is every man's concern, are easily ascertained, yet if we aim at more than this necessary knowledge, which is nothing censurable, provided that we do not suffer ourselves to be carried

away by an insatiable spirit of sceptical curiosity, nor forget that cautious humility which the narrow compass of our own intellectual vision should perpetually suggest to us; we shall find, connected with its fundamental doctrines, mysteries as incomprehensible to our understandings as eternity and infinite space, and of which we never can discover more than the Divine Wisdom has seen good to reveal to us; and therefore, in prosecuting our inquiries into things so abstruse and unfathomable, sound discretion as well as true piety warns us to guard against rash confidence in our own sagacity; that we may not presume to dogmatize, upon the scanty and uncertain materials which it is possible to collect by the exercise of reason alone, in subjects so far exceeding its utmost reach.

And, however it might gratify the desires of the most pious mind to be able to look into the deep things of God, it must ever be remembered, that the great purpose for which our religion was intended by its divine Author was, not to amuse the imaginations, or to exercise the speculative facul-

ties of the learned and studious, but to regulate the belief and influence the practice of the great body of mankind, and to afford to us all that knowledge which is conducive to the moral amendment of our nature.

This, therefore, marks the limits within which religious discussions ought to be confined between sincere Christians; who, consistently with the obligations of their faith, can have no other object in their mutual oppositions, than the elucidation and establishment of necessary truth.

Provided that the essentials of faith, as they are clearly though briefly set forth in the Apostles' Creed, are held with equal sincerity on either side; it is neither necessary nor wise to seek occasion for widening dissension, and opening a door to interminable controversy, by laying too great a stress on inferences which are of questionable certainty, or opinions which are either purely abstract, or have at least a very remote connexion with the conduct of a Christian life. On things of so subtle a nature, and which present themselves to different minds under such different aspects, perfect agreement is

morally impossible; and such slight diversity of opinion, where none exists concerning the duties or fundamental truths of religion, is a very insufficient cause for dissolving those bonds of union by which the whole family of Christ should be held together, as one body under one spiritual head.

It is certain, however, that the principal part of the doctrinal differences by which the better classes of Protestant Dissenters are divided from us are of this abstract character; while they nearly if not entirely agree with us in those definite points which we are justified in regarding as essential to the Christian faith.

Certain others, it must be acknowledged and lamented, have made shipwreck of their faith; and with them undisguised heresy is the palladium of their schism. Of such we can only entertain the charitable wish that their eyes may be opened, and *that they may see the things which belong to their everlasting peace*, before their day of grace is ended.

But of those whose hearts are right be-

fore God, and who have not sacrificed the love of truth to the love of novelty, or the vain emulation of sectarian fame, it may be hoped that a time will come, when it may please God to dispose them to review the original causes of their separation, and seriously to consider whether they are of sufficient importance still to justify its continuance, and so to keep up an irreparable breach in the household of faith. And whoever keeps in mind the strong and repeated injunctions of scripture for the preservation of unity in faith and doctrine, as well as affection, among all Christians, will be convinced that no slight cause will excuse the violation of it, and that what originally owed its justification to circumstances alone, can no longer be justified when circumstances are totally changed.

It is trite to observe, but not the less necessary to remember, that the greatest blessings may be abused by the weakness and perverseness of man; and in things which powerfully interest the feelings, the experience of common life sufficiently demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining an

invariable steadiness, and keeping at an equal distance from opposite extremes; more especially when, to the excitement which such incidents naturally generate, the heat of party spirit and the irritation of mutual contradiction are added.

These causes could not fail to produce their effects at the crisis of the reformation. And when we further consider, how minds previously accustomed to the absolute dictation of a spiritual authority which prohibited the exercise of the understanding, and utterly denied the right of private judgment in all things pertaining to religion, were likely to be affected by the sudden restoration of mental liberty, and the influx of light which burst upon the world from the study of the holy scriptures, it cannot be matter of surprise, if zeal often outstripped knowledge, and all were not temperately wise. That such was the fact is much less a reproach to the reformation, than to the authors of that thraldom and darkness which rendered such a crisis necessary for the resuscitation of religion.

To this we must look back for the origin

of those dissensions which have never since been extinguished ; and which, though not unaccompanied with great good, have yet in some respects so injuriously harassed the protestant church.

By the degree of opposition which it encountered in different countries, the character of the reformation, and the length to which each particular church departed from that of Rome, seem to have been in a great measure determined ; so that where the greatest severity had been exercised against the "reformers, the separation was ultimately widest. Too often, under the influence of feelings so excited, the legitimate object of the reformation was partially overlooked ; and whatever had existed in the church of Rome, without reference to its real origin or intrinsic propriety, was indiscriminately condemned, as unfit, for that reason alone, to be retained by those who had thrown off their subjection to her.

^a As in Holland, in consequence of the cruelties of the duke of Alva, &c. and in the south of France, from the persecution of Francis the First, &c. .

It was the peculiar happiness of the reformation in this country, that the principal authors and promoters of it were found in the highest ranks of the sacerdotal order; men who in an eminent degree combined knowledge with piety, moderation with zeal; by whose labours, finally crowned with martyrdom, those foundations of our church were laid, on which, though once overthrown by religious infatuation and popular madness, it was providentially, and beyond all human probability, reestablished, and has since endured, unshaken, the reiterated assaults both of infidelity and fanaticism; and though the tempest may again rage and swell against it, we humbly hope that it will still be preserved by the same Divine Goodness, as the centre of light and truth, to all who desire to walk in the one and love the other.

The purpose of those excellent men, in the prosecution of their holy undertaking, was to renovate what was decayed, to purify what was corrupted, and, as far as the difference of times and circumstances would permit, to restore all things to the primi-

tive standard, and neither to retain nor abolish any thing unless in conformity with that principle.

The rule of scripture was alone admitted for the proof and establishment of doctrine; while in regard to positive institutions, and things in their own nature indifferent, respect was not refused to ecclesiastical tradition, provided that it was good to the use of edifying, and not repugnant to God's word. And subject to such limitations, tradition may be resorted to as a safe and useful guide, conducive to decorum and uniformity between different churches, which otherwise, following no common rule, necessarily fall into diversities of institutions, of which, diversity of opinion, and the weakening of mutual affection, are the too probable consequence.

Between ourselves, indeed, and those Dissenters to whom we would willingly give the right hand of fellowship, there are yet some shades of difference upon doctrinal points; but those, as it has been already observed, chiefly of an abstract, and, humanly speaking, incomprehensible nature;

concerning which, therefore, it is unbecoming to pronounce dogmatically, and mutually to condemn with severity, what we believe to be erroneous on either side, so long as nothing is maintained on either which is incompatible with sound faith and sincere piety.

The really efficient differences which still subsist between ourselves and that class of Protestant Dissenters nearly all merge in church government ; of the great importance of which very inadequate notions appear to be generally entertained, both in the church and out of it ; very many persons seeming to think that it is altogether a matter of the utmost indifference ; so that whatever form may best suit their own taste and convenience, they are equally at liberty to adopt ; and that whatever human laws sanction or allow in such a case cannot be religiously wrong.

In combating such loose opinions, it is very necessary to guard ourselves against the imputation of intolerance, nor to afford to such as might be willing to avail themselves of it, a handle to misrepresent our

meaning. It should therefore be understood, and always kept in mind, that in arguing of systems we are not passing sentence upon individuals.

In the best constituted Christian communities many unworthy members are always seen to exist, who turn the advantages which they enjoy only into causes of heavier condemnation; while in the worst it is to be hoped that some may still be found, who, walking sincerely according to the light which they enjoy, would not disgrace, by their lives and conversation, a purer faith and sounder doctrine. We do not therefore take upon us to circumscribe the mercy of God, nor to exclude from the hope of eternal life all whose abstract belief is not entirely consonant to *the form of sound words* delivered in scripture. We endeavour only to disentangle truth from error, leaving the application of it to every one's own sincerity; and in judging, we judge ourselves, and not our brethren.

It is the invariable doctrine of scripture, that it is impossible to serve God accept-

ably without his grace ; that no man can live and believe as it becomes a Christian, without the help of that Holy Spirit which now in Christ's stead sanctifies and governs his church ; whereas in the state of nature we are all concluded under sin, and prone to evil continually. From hence we necessarily infer, wheresoever we see a man consistently exhibiting in his life and conversation the genuine fruits of faith and holiness, and other Christian virtues, that such an one, to whatever denomination he may belong, is influenced by the Spirit of God, and is in the way of salvation ; while, on the other hand, to whatever church or congregation he may profess adherence, how orthodox soever its creed, or apostolic its foundation, if he *hold the truth in unrighteousness*, and in his practice belie his profession, the religious advantages which he has so criminally abused will serve only to subject him to that severer judgment which our ^b Lord has pronounced upon those faithless servants *who know their Master's will, but do it not.*

^b Luke xii. 47.

It is not, however, to be concluded from hence, because we entertain this charitable hope concerning those, who, though not free from error, yet display in their lives the evidences of Christian piety, that it is a matter of no moment to what sect we belong, provided that our faith be sincere as it regards ourselves, and our actions conformable to it.

Such a principle, once admitted, can be confined within no limits; but with the same reason as it places error and orthodox belief on an equal footing, if pursued to its necessary consequences, will confound all religious distinctions, provided only that the plea of sincerity in individuals can be plausibly maintained. In flying from intolerance therefore, we must beware of running to the opposite and not less reprehensible extreme of latitudinarian indifference; which is at the same time incompatible with that very sincerity in which it makes the whole essence of religion to consist. In error there must always be proportionate danger, which no man who is adequately concerned for the salvation of

his soul would willingly encounter where that is at stake.

It is true, that a long and perilous voyage has sometimes been performed without loss in an unsound vessel ; but it is not from thence to be argued, that it would not have been much wiser, if the option were given, to embark in a sound one ; and the same reasoning may be applied with still greater force against presumptuous rashness in religion, where we are not abandoned to the weakness and uncertainty of our own judgment, in choosing the most acceptable way of serving God, and the safest road to salvation, but have strong scriptural authority, if not an express command to direct us. This also is a case in which ecclesiastical tradition, intimately connected with undoubted history, simply attesting a certain fact, ought to have its due weight in aid of scripture, even with those who most scrupulously reject its authority in questions of faith and doctrine.

Now it will hardly be denied by any man in the least conversant with ecclesiastical antiquity, whose mind is not wholly dis-

torted by prejudice, or overheated with controversy, that the system of church government, instituted by the apostles, was the episcopal; and there is no fact in sacred history more certain, than that Titus and Timothy were ordained bishops by St. Paul, the one at Ephesus, the other in Crete, to ordain elders, to take care that they preached none but the true doctrine, which they had learned of him, and to regulate and superintend the churches committed to their charge.

It is equally indisputable, that the same form of church government was universally established through the Christian world, and that it continued every where unchanged till the sixteenth century, when a different system was introduced by Calvin, in that portion of the reformed church which followed his opinions.

It is therefore a question of the most serious importance, whether a form of government coeval with the church itself, and every where received, was a matter of an indifferent nature, which might be abolished on grounds of secular policy, or ar-

bitrary preference for another ; or whether it had any thing of divine authority connected with it, and ought therefore to be perpetually and universally retained ; in the consideration of which the scripture itself will be our safest guide, and history need only be appealed to in support of the conclusions which we draw from it.

The final commission of our Saviour to his apostles, before his ascension into heaven, was, to *go forth and teach all nations, to preach the doctrines which he had delivered to them throughout the world, and so to lay the foundations of an universal church.* He had before assured them, that after his departure he would send to them *the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who should lead them into all truth, and bring all things to their remembrance which he had commanded them.* And again we read, that when the time was come for his return to the Majesty on high, he charged his disciples *not to depart from Jerusalem till they had received the fulfilment of this promise, by*

^c Matthew xxviii. 19, 20.

^d Mark xvi. 15, &c.

^e John xiv. 26. xvi. 7, &c.

^f Acts i. 4.

which they were to be qualified for the execution of their office, and not to undertake it in reliance on their own unassisted powers. And, agreeably to our Lord's command, we read in the Acts that they continued all together at Jerusalem till after the miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and in actual expectation of that event; after which they went forth, as they were severally called, to the work of the ministry in different regions, and preached the word both to Jews and Gentiles.

The sum of the controversy, therefore, between those who have retained and those who have rejected the episcopal constitution of the church, seems fairly reducible to this issue: What was the extent of the apostles' commission, and how far did they enjoy the extraordinary assistance of the Holy Ghost in the fulfilment of it? Was their commission limited to teaching the principles of doctrine promulgated by our Saviour, or did it extend also to the founding of a church in which those principles should be preserved for ever? and was the

extraordinary assistance of the Spirit limited to their oral and written instructions in matters of doctrine, or did it extend to the precepts which they gave, and the rules which they prescribed for the government of all Christians incorporated into one spiritual society; and however widely diffused through the world, and differing in their temporal states, yet united in one holy fellowship, being called ^g *in one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* and ^h *having access by one Spirit to the Father.*

We hold, undoubtedly, that they were equally guided by the Holy Ghost in the execution of both these parts of their commission, between which so intimate a connexion subsists; and the necessity of proving the contrary, and explaining the reasons of it, rests with those who admit the one and deny the other; and that it is a subject entitled to the most attentive and respectful consideration of those who maintain either opinion, must be equally admitted by all serious Christians.

^g Eph. iv. 4.

^h Eph. ii. 18.

Those who acknowledge the apostolical origin of episcopacy, though not in our sense, and yet have rejected it from their ecclesiastical polity, rely principally on the disputed meaning of the word *επίσκοπος*, which they affirm to be used in the New Testament indiscriminately with *πρέσβυτερος*, without any idea of superiority attached to it. I shall not attempt to abridge the arguments with which this assertion has been so decisively overthrown by the illustrious luminaries of our church. It will be sufficient for my present limited purpose to observe, that if in any case, surely in this, the concurrent testimony of all history may be allowed to outweigh the force of etymological reasoning, and arguments founded upon the precarious basis of verbal criticism ; and that the sense which through eighteen centuries the whole Christian world, with the exception of that moderate portion of it which since the reformation has adhered to the system of Calvin, has affixed to the title of an office which has been maintained and exercised in the church without intermission from the very

beginning to our own times, ought to be received as the true one ; and that although the extent of jurisdiction exercised by bishops may have varied at different times and in different countries, according as the church itself has been dominant or depressed, persecuted or prosperous, recognised and supported by the state, or merely tolerated, the spiritual, which is the only indefeasible attribute of the episcopal character, with power to ordain ministers and to watch over the administration of the word and doctrine, has ever been preserved.

To those who believe with us the plenary inspiration of the apostles in all things necessary to religion, to prove the apostolical origin of any thing is sufficient to confirm its authority ; and to an apostolical tradition, which can be uncontestedly proved to be such by an unbroken chain of evidence, we maintain that the utmost deference is due ; and we must be careful not to confound traditions, so attested, with those which the church of Rome pretends to have in her possession, and brings forward

to solve all difficulties where scripture is either silent or against her.

The tradition of institutions, which is capable of the most distinct historical proof, stands on a totally different footing from that of doctrines, which is destitute of all proof; nor do we admit tradition of any kind as apostolical, which is not before all things consonant with scripture, as we have already shewn concerning some of the most obnoxious superstitions of the church of Rome, and might equally prove concerning many others, for which they claim the same origin, but which we certainly know from scripture to have been unheard-of in the apostolic age, and therefore the inventions of a later period.

But when an institution is plainly recognised in scripture, attested by the most ancient and authentic history, and universally received throughout the world in every Christian church founded by the apostles or their immediate successors, we have the utmost certainty which reason can demand or the nature of things admit, that it is a genuine apostolical tradition; and if

we respect the authority of the apostles, we are bound to receive it, though not expressly commanded.

And such evidence we have concerning the institution of episcopacy, which has uniformly prevailed in every branch of the universal church, whether orthodox or corrupt, from the western frontier of Europe to the most remote regions of Asia, in which the gospel has been preached, from the Arctic ocean to the torrid zone, including that extremely interesting member of the Christian community, far separated from the parent stock, and surrounded on all sides by the darkness of paganism, which modern researches have brought to light in the Syrian church of Malabar¹. This primitive branch of the universal church, which had retained its faith and apostolic order unchanged without external support or communication with any other, except, indeed, the persecution which in modern times it had endured from the agents of Rome, comes forward in these late ages,

¹ Vide Buchanan's Christian Researches in Asia.

to confirm, by a testimony beyond all exception, this important truth.

Even Calvin, while he labours consistently with the characteristic feature of his system, to lower the episcopal office, and to establish his favourite theory of the original equality of bishops and presbyters in the days of the apostles, is constrained by the force of historic testimony to admit, that at least in the age immediately following, bishops, invested with a priority of rank and authority above the order of presbyters, were instituted in the church, for the prevention of discord and maintenance of order; and apparently seeks to justify the abolition of episcopacy in the church over which he presided, by exhibiting the abuses and disorders which had been introduced under the papal domination in the appointment of bishops, and the flagrant enormities, of which the most worthless men advanced by such means to the episcopal dignity, had been guilty^k.

But such a mode of arguing is in any case

^k Institut. lib. IV. cap. 4.

inadmissible, unless it can be shewn that the thing abused was such in its nature, that it necessarily led to abuse; and there is not an institution, civil or religious, which ought not to be equally abolished, if the demerits of individuals, who have at any time grossly neglected or unfaithfully abused their trust, can be admitted as a sufficient ground for concluding against the intrinsic goodness and utility of the institution itself; and on the same plea of abuse the orders of presbyters might be proscribed as well as that of bishops, since in the dark ages preceding the reformation the same corruption of manners and the same neglect of their sacred duties are imputed to both¹.

It may be supposed possible, that in a particular conjuncture the interests of true religion might require an opposition to the authority of those whose special office it is to guard and adorn it; and the pertinacity with which the bishops in general, either influenced by the civil government of their

¹ Vide Mosheim, *passim.*

several countries, or taking their tone from the pope, who held them in abject dependence, or from a predilection for the errors and corruptions in which they had been bred, contended against the beginnings of the reformation, affords as strong a case for refusing canonical subjection to their authority, as can well be imagined; since the most venerable of religious institutions having for their object the preservation and advancement of religion, if ever a real opposition should arise between them, which, however, is in no case to be too hastily concluded, cannot be set in competition with religion itself, but the means must give place to the end.

But this, where it did exist, was only a temporary, not a permanent necessity, and did not require a final subversion of apostolical order; the return to which should not have been delayed beyond the crisis which seemed to demand a temporary suspension of it.

In our own country, however, no such necessity for innovation could ever be pleaded. Here, as it has been above remarked,

the reformation found among the chief members of the hierarchy its firmest and ablest defenders; and to no other circumstance, divine Providence so ordaining, was it so much indebted for its successful progress and final completion. Under their temperate guidance, it escaped the shoals of fanaticism and popular tumult; and when a change in the supreme civil power had placed the means of vengeance in the hands of its enemies, they were the first to feel their force. By their sufferings they confirmed the work, which their zeal, piety, and learning had achieved; and their memory must be ever blessed by every friend of the reformation, with which it is inseparably united.

To them, under God, we owe it, that our church in that difficult season retained its primitive order and apostolical constitution, while it threw off the corruptions which had grown over its venerable structure in a long series of benighted ages, under the spiritual usurpation of Rome. Theirs is the praise, that no pernicious novelties were introduced in doctrine or disci-

pline, no untried theories preferred before the lessons of experience, and finally that our church was settled on those sound and solid foundations which can never be shaken, while Christian faith remains ; and which have rendered it the firmest pillar of the reformation, as well as the most prominent object of hostility to its enemies, and indeed to all the enemies of religion ; who evermore bear their testimony to its superior excellence above all other Christian establishments, by the peculiar bitterness of their hatred against it.

With such incontrovertible evidence in favour of the episcopal system among us, it seems difficult to account for the violent prejudices which some classes of Dissenters have assiduously cherished against it ; and which, indeed, furnish a melancholy proof, that even in things of the utmost importance, out of which all temporal considerations should be banished, men are yet too often governed by their feelings rather than their reason, and that party zeal is stronger than the love of truth.

If ever, as some have pretended, honest

Dissenters did suspect our church of a secret leaning towards that of Rome, such a prejudice is now without excuse. The comparatively little account which Romanists of latter times have made of any other protestant church, and the insidious attacks which they are so eager and indefatigable to make on ours, ought long ago to have opened their eyes.

And yet there are those, of whom we would not speak with intentional disrespect, who reproach us as inconsistent protestants, because we have reformed without changing what was essentially good, and under the influence of inveterate prejudice continue to couple together popery and prelacy as cognate evils, which a perfect reformation would have exploded with equal reprobation, and seem still to think that there is some essential affinity between them.

But of all the errors into which zeal without knowledge ever betrayed men, this is certainly one of the most flagrant and extraordinary.

While the Roman pontiffs were aiming

at that supremacy and dominion, which by degrees they acquired over the whole western church, there was no point which they laboured with greater art and more consistent perseverance, as conducive to their main object, than to reduce all other bishops to a state of vassalage and subserviency to themselves; in the accomplishment of which they principally availed themselves of the zealous services of the monastic orders, whom they kept in immediate dependence upon their own authority, and exempted from the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishops.

At the council of Trent the pope's agents steadily pursued the same policy, and resisted every proposition for declaring that bishops held their office in the church by divine right, lest by admitting such a claim they should render them independent of him; while not a few of that generally corrupt and subservient assembly strenuously though ineffectually contended to regain the privileges which belonged to them as Christian bishops, and emancipate themselves from the subjection to which they had been

reduced towards the see of Rome ; clearly foreseeing, that unless that could be previously effected, all attempts to bring about such a reformation, as it was universally acknowledged that the church required, and the accomplishment of which was the professed object of assembling the council, would be defeated by the influence and policy of the court of Rome, which had an interest in perpetuating abuses, of which every province of the church loudly complained ^m.

The event fully justified their apprehensions. The real wounds of religion were slightly skinned over, or left untouched ; great evils were palliated, and little ones ostentatiously corrected ; what the pope lost in the extent of his spiritual sovereignty by the reformation, was added to him in the increase of his power over that which remained ; and all real reformation of errors and corruptions was rendered thenceforth impossible, so long as that power shall

^m See Father Paul's History of the Council of Trent, passim ; also Oath of Fealty to the Pope still taken by every Roman Catholic bishop.

stand. And to this unhappy result nothing was so materially conducive, as the enslaving of the episcopal order; which was effected by the dexterous policy of the papal managers, in playing upon the fears of some, and the hopes of others, and sowing divisions amongst all.

Had the episcopal order in the church of Rome retained its just independence, it seems incredible that men so pious and enlightened as Fenelon, Massillon, and others, who were in their day the lights and ornaments of the Gallican church, and are still its greatest glory, should never in their zeal for religion have ventured openly to arraign the corruptions of doctrine and worship, of which they could not but be sensible, nor have sought even by noiseless and temperate means to apply a corrective to them ; and that they did not do so, is one of the most melancholy proofs, that the system of the church of Rome excludes the possibility of internal reformation, and that the sovereignty of the pope is the indissoluble bond of ignorance and corruption, wherever it is acknowledged ; and if ever

reformation should make its way into that church in defiance of so many obstacles, we may confidently predict that it will be either the immediate cause or the necessary consequence of the restoration of the episcopacy to its primitive rights.

That the consequences of abolishing or degrading it in many protestant churches have been extremely injurious to religion is lamentably notorious, and is in effect acknowledged by the endeavours which have been recently made in the chief protestant ⁿ kingdom on the continent of Europe to reestablish it: and wherever the evil resulting from its abolition has been less visible, we shall there find that an equivalent authority has been exercised by corporate ecclesiastical bodies, which, however, if they are equally efficient for maintaining church government, are yet wanting in many of the advantages which belong to the apostolical constitution of the church.

But the full measure of the evil is found in those smaller sects and insulated congregations, which individually acknowledge no

ⁿ Prussia.

superior authority, and maintain no bond of union in faith or worship with any other denomination of Christians, but assert their own competency to regulate all the concerns of religion within themselves, forgetting ^o that the branch unless it abide in the vine beareth no fruit, and that all true ^p members of Christ are members also one of another. And so totally is the true notion of the church, which to be true must be catholic or universal in its principles, lost among them by the necessary consequences of religious anarchy, that there are those, and not the most ignorant among them, who even profess to believe, that every kind of religious establishment, the main purpose and primary effect of which is to preserve unity in religion, and at the same time to extend its benefits to the whole community, is essentially inconsistent with genuine Christianity ; and as our Lord, to preclude the misconceptions of carnal Jews, and to obviate the suspicions of the ruling powers concerning the nature and design

^o John xv. 7.

^p Ephes. iv. 25. v. 30.

of his religion, declared *that his kingdom was not of this world*, these inconsequent reasoners infer, that it ought to remain for ever in the same state of alienation from the civil commonwealth, as when the world was yet unconverted and everywhere hostile to it; and for the same reason they contend that all church government, beyond that which each separate congregation exercises over its own members, is an usurpation over their natural and religious liberty. By many, in pursuance of the same anarchical and antisocial principles, all creeds and confessions of faith are rejected, as human compositions void of authority; and the members of such religious sects left at large to find out a creed for themselves, or committed without reserve to the honesty, sincerity, and discretion of their teachers; who on their part are scarcely restrained by any other necessity, than that of accommodating their doctrine to the taste of their hearers, and carefully forbearing to offend their prejudices.

The consequences of thus subjecting all things to the unbounded licence of private

judgment, without guide or landmark, have been such, as could alone be expected by reasonable men.

Many who are full of sectarian zeal are at the same time wholly unsettled in their creed, and more apt to dispute about abstract principles, than to bring forth the peaceful fruits of righteousness; many are ready to embrace every novelty; and many appear to have come to the dangerous conclusion, that it is of small moment what men believe, provided that they retain the name of Christians, and manifest a decent respect for the moral duties: and whereas He who is himself *the way, the truth, and the life*, has in the most distinct terms warned all who hope for salvation through him, *without whom no man cometh to the Father*, *that strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life*, the sectarian spirit, on the contrary, boldly assures its delirious followers, that the way is easy and the gate wide, and that in fact the most devious paths which men may choose for them-

^{w q} John xiv. 6.

^r Matt. vii. 13, 14.

selves will finally lead to the same termination.

Causeless schism, though it generally sets out with high pretensions of zeal for the truth, is always in the end injurious to it, and is scarcely reconcileable with any feeling of true piety. If religion, as it is ostentatiously asserted by the advocates of these latitudinarian principles, be indeed exclusively a concern between man and his God, how fearful ought such a consideration to make every serious Christian of acting with levity, rashness, or insincerity, where he, with whom he has to do, is no other than his Creator, Redeemer, and Judge, “to “whom all hearts be open and all desires “known!” And yet this natural inference seems entirely to have escaped those whom the sectarian spirit has possessed, and they appear to think that the freedom of conscience which the laws of the land most properly allow, (for without that freedom it would be impossible by human means to provide either for purity of doctrine or sincerity in religion,) makes that to be guiltless before God, which is not cognizable by

human tribunals ; and liberty of conscience is pleaded as the comprehensive apology for the most dangerous aberrations of heterodox presumption.

Thus, too, a door is opened to the most perverted species of ambition.

To raise themselves into notice, and to draw congregations, men, conscious of some talents, and not restrained by that fear of offending, which is inseparable from true piety, are tempted to start new opinions and preach strange doctrines ; and if they are but gifted with fluency of speech to recommend them, which with those whose itching ears can only be pleased with novelty ever passes for wisdom, they become the founders of new sects, out of which, by the same process of subdivision, others again are generated ; blind leaders are blindly followed ; new errors are opposed to old ones, and truth alone is unheeded and forgotten.

These evils we justly ascribe to the abolition of the primitive constitution of the church, and the want of that mild control, which the apostles, guided by the Holy Ghost, established for the preserva-

tion of order and sound doctrine in the household of faith; and the efficacy of which, for attaining those important ends, is so evidently superior to that of any system, which the inventions of later ages have substituted for it.

Our dissenting brethren are not in general supposed to be more favourable to the papal power than ourselves. But how greatly is it to be regretted, that they do not consider how much the cause of that power is served by the abuse of Christian liberty; how strong an argument is supplied to its advocates and apologists by the varieties and variations of doctrine, which different sects, unworthily assuming the name of protestants, have introduced, and which papists urge as a proof against all protestants, whom it is their standing policy to confound under one denomination, however differing among themselves, that they have been given up to the spirit of delusion, as a penalty for renouncing the infallible church of Rome. And, indeed, if the same charge of irreverent levity and mutability of doctrine could be substanti-

ated against all protestants, as against these ephemeral sects, we could hardly refuse to confess with shame, that we had abused the greatest mercy of God, and that man was, in truth, as they represent him, incapable of rendering to his Maker a reasonable service, and fit only for a slavish religion. But, blessed be God, these are but small blemishes upon the surface of our system, which do not affect its internal soundness, though they may expose us to misrepresentation, and prejudice against the cause of truth those who look no deeper than the outside of things.

Against the whole protestant cause, often as they are so applied by its adversaries, they afford no argument whatever, though a very strong one indeed against that departure from apostolical order, by which some, otherwise sound and sincere members of Christ, are distinguished; and it is devoutly to be wished, that those whom it especially concerns would seriously consider it; while to ourselves it is an additional reason for fervent gratitude, that the same good Providence which has delivered us

from the bondage of superstition, has equally preserved us from the distractions of religious anarchy ; nor if we weigh well the manifold evils attendant upon both, can we be too thankful that we have been enabled to escape them.

But if in this we have much cause to bless God for his signal mercies towards us, we have none for flattering ourselves, but should rather cherish a godly fear, lest we prove ourselves unworthy of them ; for the religious advantages which we enjoy, as it may be truly said, above all other Christian nations, are talents, which by Him who has committed them to our keeping we shall be expected to improve, and for which we must hereafter give account. And as I speak now for the last time in the discharge of this duty, in the presence of so many who are either invested with the sacred ministry, or future candidates for it, let me pray them to suffer without offence the word of exhortation from one who deeply feels his own deficiencies ; that they would remember the warning of our Lord,

that ^s *to whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required;* and therefore, that if our church is, as we firmly believe, the purest in doctrine and the most apostolic in its constitution of any upon earth, a more cogent necessity is laid indeed upon all its members to shew by their life and conversation, that they have profited by the means of grace which have been so amply afforded them; but in an especial degree upon its ministers, according to their sacred and awful engagement, by the discreet and zealous discharge of their important functions, to ^t *magnify their office* in the sight of men, and by good example and sound doctrine to excite and attract them to the service of God.

Concerning those whom we yet regard as brethren in Christ, although we have renounced their communion, because they had defiled the truth with the intermixture of gross and sinful corruption, and those, on the other hand, who have departed in the

^s Luke xii. 48.

^t Rom. xi. 13.

opposite extreme from the apostolic standard of doctrine and government which we have retained, it behoves us to hope the best, and to think the most charitably; to respect sincere piety wherever we see it, and to remember, after all, that an unholy life is the worst heresy.

Great is the power of truth; and although its progress may be retarded for a while by obstinate prejudice, and its light obscured by the mists of sophistry, we must patiently wait for God's good time, pray for his blessing upon the endeavours which are used for its advancement, and never doubt of its final prevalence over all opposing errors.

In the mean while, equally rejecting the spurious liberality which regards all creeds and all forms of worship with the same complacency, and guarding against the intolerant presumption which bars the gates of mercy against all but the members of its own community, let us, according to the command of the Lord by the prophet, *seek the old paths and the good way, and diligently walk therein, that we may find*

rest unto our souls; remembering that holy scripture, which was given for the instruction of all, is of "*no private interpretation*, and that no doctrine of modern invention can be true, consistently with the faithful promise of our Lord to his apostles, and in them to all who should believe in his name through their preaching, "that "he would send his Holy Spirit ^xto guide "them into all truth, to teach them all things, "and to abide with them for ever.

^u 2 Peter i. 10. ^x John xvi. 13, &c. xiv. 16, &c.

THE END.

